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The Irish theatre of Brian Friel: Texts and contexts

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THE IRISH THEATRE OF BRIAN FRIEL:

TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

by

Mary Kate Lowrey Dennis

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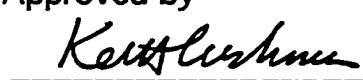

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This dissertation places the sixteen plays of the contemporary Irish playwright Brian Friel, one of the leading dramatists writing in the English language today, in the context of Irish culture. I investigate the various Irish myths and legends to which Friel alludes in his work, the socio-economic conditions in Ireland at the time depicted in the plays, and the historical and political events Friel has used as a basis for the plays. I look at the relationship between the literature and the society in order to determine the influence that conditions in Ireland--particularly Ulster and Northern Ireland, Friel's home--have had upon his work.

Friel's plays reveal his awareness of the political and cultural divisions that exist in his homeland and the fragmentation of the Irish psyche resulting from these divisions. This fragmentation appears in his themes and experimental dramatic techniques. His work combines a knowledge and understanding of Irish problems with an ability to universalize this knowledge so that his plays have important application for people in similar cultural conditions in other parts of the world.

Friel views Ireland's myths, stereotypes, opinions, and images of itself as both the key to understanding his country's problems and as a context that must be reexamined and reappraised if Ireland is to find a solution to its current crisis. Friel's role in the Field Day Theatre Company, an organization he founded for the purpose of

taking drama to all parts of Northern Ireland and the Republic, attests to his involvement in effecting a change of consciousness among the Irish toward their country's past, her present crisis, and her future as an emerging nation. The success of Friel's latest play, *Dancing at Lughnasa,* a 1992 Tony winner, indicates his success in universalizing his themes to appeal to an international audience.

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I shall always be grateful to my advisor Dr. Keith Cushman for suggesting Brian Friel from all the Irish writers I was considering for this dissertation. Friel's work has made my study an exciting, enlightening, and inspiring adventure. I also wish to thank Dr. Cushman for his insightful guidance, for trying valiantly to keep me on track, and for always managing to be encouraging. I thank my committee, Dr. Randolph Bulgin, Dr. Charles Davis, Dr. James Evans, and Dr. Ronald Cassell for their inspiration and friendship. My advisor, my committee, the English faculty, and my fellow students at UNCG have made the undertaking of this degree one of the best decisions I have ever made. I also thank my colleagues and former teachers at Appalachian State for their interest and encouragement.

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ABBREVIATIONS

All references to the published texts of plays or short stories by Brian Friel are to the following editions and are designated by the appropriate abbreviation and followed by the relevant page reference. For dates of premiere performances and first publications, see Appendix A.

Aris *Aristocrats. Selected Plays.* Washington: Catholic U of America P, 1988.

Cass *The Loves of Cass McGuire.* New York: Samuel French, 1966.

CC *The Communication Cord.* London: Faber, 1983.

CF *Crystal and Fox.* New York: Samuel French, 1970.

DAL *Dancing at Lughnasa.* London: Faber, 1990.

"Diviner" "The Diviner." *The Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories.* Ed. William Trevor. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.

EW *The Enemy Within.* Newark: Proscenium, 1979.

FH *Faith Healer. Selected Plays.* Washington: Catholic U of America P, 1988.

FC *The Freedom of the City. Selected Plays.* Washington: Catholic U of America P, 1988.

FS *Fathers and Sons: After the Novel by Ivan Turgenev.* London: Faber, 1987.

GI *The Gentle Island.* London: Davis Poynter, 1973.

Gold *The Gold in the Sea.* London: Faber, 1969.

LQ *Living Quarters. Selected Plays.* Washington: Catholic U of America P, 1988.

Vert *The London Vertigo: Based on a Play by Charles Macklin.* Loughcrew, Ire.: Gallery, 1990.

LWL *Lovers: Winners and Losers.* New York: Farrar, 1968.

MH *Making History.* London: Faber, 1989.

MS *The Mundy Scheme.* New York: Samuel French, 1970.

Phil *Philadelphia, Here I Come! Selected Plays.* Washington: Catholic U of America P, 1988.

Saucer *The Saucer of Larks.* London: Gollancz, 1962.

Sisters *Three Sisters by Anton Chekhov, A Translation.* Dublin: Gallery, 1981.

Trans *Translations. Selected Plays.* Washington: Catholic U of America P, 1988.

Vol *Volunteers.* London: Faber, 1979.

CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE

BRIAN FRIEL: THEATRE IN A DIVIDED LAND

The Irish playwright Brian Friel has clearly emerged as a major figure in contemporary world drama and as the true inheritor of John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey. His latest play, *Dancing at Lughnasa,* opened on Broadway on October 24, 1991, after successful seasons in Dublin's Abbey Theatre and in London, where it won the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Play of Year. In New York it was nominated for eight Antoinette Perry (Tony) Awards and won a Tony for Best Play on a New York Stage for the 1991-92 Season. Its director Patrick Mason received a Tony for Best Direction, and one of the play's ensemble cast, Brid Brennan, was named Best Featured Actress in a Play.

For three decades Friel has occupied an important place in Irish theatre. Before that he had established a name for himself as a short story writer whose captivating narrative voice and engaging style had secured a "first refusal" contract with *The New Yorker.* He now has to his credit sixteen published plays, four collections of short stories, and three adaptations/translations for the stage: Chekhov's *The Three Sisters,* Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons,* and Charles Macklin's *The True Born Irishman,* adapted as *The London Vertigo.* In 1989 the British Broadcasting Company (BBC Radio) devoted a season to six of Friel's plays, making him the first living

dramatist to be so honored. Since 1980, Friel's new plays have toured Northern Ireland and the Republic with Field Day, a theatre company organized by Friel and actor-director Stephen Rea to take a cultural approach toward alleviating the situation of conflict in Northern Ireland.

James Coakley in *Comparative Drama* (1973) says Friel "brings to the stage a remarkably sophisticated literary sensibility, a confident sense of what is theatrical, and a precise and exquisitely lyrical talent for the spoken word" (191). In *A Short History of Irish Literature* (1986), Seamus Deane observes, "Friel's achievement is on such a scale that through him we are enabled to re-read the plays of Behan, O'Casey and Synge, Beckett and the late Yeats" (246). In *Irish Writers and the Theatre* (1987), Emelie Fitzgibbon calls Friel "the major contemporary Irish dramatist" and says he "expresses in a style which is totally his own the conflicts of a society and of individuals undergoing an unprecedented and rapid period of change" (38). Michael Etherton (1989) says, "Brian Friel sharpens our perceptions and makes us able to understand our human condition, and the deepening ironies and contradictions of our age" (147). In *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* (1990) Richard Pine says of Friel, "He becomes increasingly the subject of serious critical attention which is tending to focus on the relationship between playwriting and other kinds of writing such as politics and history" (1). These assessments reflect a growing recognition of the scope and significance of Friel's work.

Although four book-length studies are available on Friel,[1] two of which came off the press in 1990, his plays have yet to be thoroughly studied in the context of the Irish cultural milieu upon which they rely so heavily. The mythological, historical, socio-economic, and political background of his work has not been fully explored. Much basic work needs to be done.

The aim of this study, then, is to examine Friel's sixteen major plays in the context of Irish culture. I use the term "culture" in the analytic sense used by the social sciences and anthropology to refer to the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another, "the whole system of significations by which a society or a section of it understands itself and its relations with the world" (Cairns and Richards vii). My focus is on the relationship between the literature and the society. As my subtitle suggests, I attempt to connect the plays with realms located beyond the words of the text itself--with the motives from which Friel's drama springs and the culture within which the plays exist. Although Friel's plays tell personal stories, in Ireland personal stories are always political. The country's long history of conflict has created a society in which no life can be examined without taking account of its social and historical context. The unifying theme of my study is Friel's attempt to grapple with the divided nature of his homeland and to define his role as artist in this society.

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[1] See D. E. S. Maxwell, Ulf Dantanus, George O'Brien, and Richard Pine.

Speaking of the last two decades in Ireland, Terence Brown says. "God knows, fracture has been the dominant experience of that period for most of us" (169). Denis Donoghue, in *We Irish,* reminds us:

> If there is a distinctive Irish experience, it is one of division, exacerbated by the fact that division in a country so small seems perverse. . . . At various times, the division has taken these forms: Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist and Unionist, Ireland and England, North and South, the country and the one bloated city of Dublin, Gaelic Ireland and Anglo-Ireland, the comfortable and the poor, . . . pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty, child and parents, the Irish and the English languages, the visible Ireland and the hidden Ireland, landlord and tenant, the Big House and the hovel. To which it is now necessary to add: a defensive Church and an increasingly secular State, Irish law and European law. (16)

Division has been a fact of Irish life from earliest Celtic times. The Irish personality reflects an inherent sense of doubleness. Thus, division is the dominant theme in Friel's drama. As Emelie Fitzgibbon observes, "His Ireland is . . . split between private and public conceptions of itself; his people, too, are dislocated and ill at ease with themselves" (38). Subsidiary themes run throughout his work, revealing deep fissures in his characters' personalities: the clash between illusion and reality, the tension between personal goals and family loyalty, and the conflict between father and son as a metaphor for the struggle between authority and freedom.

Not only is division the major theme, but fragmentation functions as a chief technical device in all Friel's plays. Two actors play the same character, portraying the private self and the public

self; another character is split between a seven-year-old self and an adult self; one character represents the reverse side of another. Action is fragmented between past and present or shifts rapidly from one setting to another. The role of the audience alternates between that of onlookers and that of participants in the action. Friel regularly presents two or three versions of the same event as having equal validity. As a result of this fragmentation, in nearly every play someone, a part of someone, or a number of people die--are sacrificed. Friel's interest in fragmentation sets up a special kind of conflict that is not neatly nor usually resolved.

Because in Friel's work context illuminates text while text illuminates context, my argument is necessarily circuitous. When a play involves the problem of emigration, for example, Friel presents the personal conflict of the prospective émigré--a conflict that fragments the main character into public and private selves--by having two actors play one character. The fragmentation reveals the hidden emotional quagmire: a father-son impasse in communication. Friel has, in fact, said that the play I am describing, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!,* is about love, not emigration. The divided character of Gar serves as metaphor for the Irish psyche, split between public image and private consciousness. When the play concludes with Gar unable to explain why he is going to America and uncertain that he has made the right choice, Friel is bringing a modern perception and treatment to an old problem, revealing the alienation and anguish the emigrant feels and explaining a deep-seated tension in the Irish mind. An understanding of the forces that have caused Irish men and

women to emigrate facilitates our comprehension of Gar's problem, but Friel's emphasis on thwarted affection and split personality universalizes the Irish situation. A knowledge of emigration statistics contributes to our appreciation of the play, but it is more important that the play makes us *experience* the statistics of emigration.

Friel's background readily reveals personal reasons for his viewing Irish culture in terms of fragmentation. He was born in Ulster, in Killyclogher, one and one-half miles northeast of Omagh in County Tyrone in 1929, nine years after the establishment of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. He has two birth certificates, one for January 9, one for January 10, both with the name Bernard Patrick Friel. Pine suggests that at the time of Friel's birth the Protestant bureaucracy discouraged the registration of Gaelic names, and the Anglicization "Bernard" was substituted for the intended "Brian" (15). Dantanus reports that in the parish registry at the time of his baptism the name is recorded as Brian Patrick Friel.[2] From his birth, the divided nature of Friel's homeland has influenced his life. Pine believes that "it is not only Friel's lightheartedness but also a sense of the duality in his background and in his destiny" that prompts him to say, "Perhaps I'm twins" (15).

Friel's paternal grandfather was born in Donegal but came to Derry where he worked as a jarvey (a hackney coachman). Friel's

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[2] *Brian Friel, A Study* (London: Faber, 1988) 220, qtd. in Pine 15.

mother's family is from Glenties, in the west of County Donegal. In 1963 he wrote a travelogue piece for *Holiday* entitled "A Fine Day at Glenties," which provides an interesting picture of this area that is the setting for so many of his stories and plays, most significantly *Dancing at Lughnasa,* a play in which the five sisters are based on his mother and aunts. All Friel's grandparents were Irish speakers, and two of them, his mother's mother and his father's father, were unlettered, yet his father became a teacher. Even Friel's ancestral background is divided, then, between the remote, rural, primitive, peaceful life of Donegal and the comparatively modern, progressive, educated population of Derry with its conflicts and turmoil.

Friel's early years were divided between County Tyrone, where he lived, and County Donegal, where he went for vacations. Tyrone is in Northern Ireland, and Donegal, although further north geographically, is in the Republic. The beautiful, wild, sparsely populated Donegal countryside came to represent an idyllic existence to Friel in these pre-adolescent years. Donegal seemed even more idyllic after 1939, when Friel's father transferred from Omagh to a teaching position in the Long Tower school in Derry and the family moved to "the city." Second only to Belfast in size and importance of the cities in Northern Ireland, and situated on the border between the North and the Republic, Derry is a city with a history of strife.

This history goes back to AD 546 when St. Columcille, or Columba, whom Friel makes the central character of *The Enemy*

Within, founded a monastery on Doire Calgaich or "Calgach's oak-wood," an oak-studded hill located in an arc of the River Foyle. By the twelfth century, Derry replaced Kells, County Meath, as the center of a chain of monasteries founded by St. Columcille's followers.

Friel has based his play *Making History* on the life of Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, who, with Rory O'Donnell, Earl of Tyrconnel, surrendered to James I in 1603 and in 1607 fled to Italy in the famous "Flight of the Earls." After the Flight of the Earls, James I granted Derry and a vast tract of adjacent land to the citizens of London. Derry became Londonderry, London companies laid out a new city, and Protestant settlers moved in. A. M. Maughan describes the influx:

> Soon high-castled ships were crowding the northern ports, unloading Scotsmen and women with their lusty babies wrapped in plaids, their cradles and griddles and long-handled plows. From England came the Londoners, bringing with them little prefabricated wooden houses packed in sections, and cannon presented by the city of London to set up on the walls of Derry. . . . Lastly came the French Huguenots with their damask looms; for their shuttles they planted the hornbeam trees which in spring blow white blossoms over Ulster's face. . . . The dispossessed Irish watched the busy newcomers with hatred. (164)

Derry sided with the Parliamentarians in the 1640s war with the Royalists. When Jacobites and Williamites clashed in the 1680s, Derry supported William of Orange. In 1689 James II with his armies marched on Derry, "to have the gates . . . slammed shut in his face by thirteen apprentice lads" (Maughan 166). The siege of Derry,

lasting 105 days, was the longest siege in British history. The starving people "gave a purse of silver for a rat grown fat on the bodies of the slain" (Maughan 166). Finally, the siege was broken on July 28, 1689; James was defeated and fled to France. Throughout its history, Doire, Derry, or Londonderry (depending on the speaker's political persuasion) has witnessed conflict.

In 1920, when a parliament was being set up to rule the six Protestant counties of Ulster that were resisting Home Rule, Derry with a 56.2% Catholic majority voted against Partition. The Nationalists won control of the city and pledged allegiance to the Dáil in Dublin. But Derry was important to the Protestants, and by abolishing proportional representation and adjusting election boundaries, they regained control. Since 1924 the Northern government has stage-managed elections, assuring themselves of victory by gerrymandering the city's electoral wards, limiting the franchise to rate-payers, and granting plural voting rights based on property holding. The following table shows how the city was divided in 1966 with an adult population of 30,376, made up of 20,102 Catholics and 10,274 Protestants:

Voting results in Derry, 1966

South Ward	North Ward	Waterside Ward
11,185 voters	6,476 voters	5,549 voters
10,047 Catholics	2,530 Catholics	1,852 Catholics
1,138 Protestants	3,946 Protestants	3,697 Protestants
returning 8 Nationalist Councillors	returning 8 Unionist Councillors	returning 8 Unionist Councillors

Source: Dantanus 24

Friel's father, a Catholic, was elected to the Derry Corporation from the South Ward for three terms before the Corporation was suspended in 1969 because of the "bother," as the violence in Northern Ireland is called with typical Irish meiosis. As a member of the Catholic majority but political minority, Friel grew up in a climate of political tension, economic depression, and general apathy.

He attended the Long Tower school, completed his secondary education at Saint Columb's College in Derry, and then went to Saint Patrick's College in Maynooth, the Republic of Ireland's national seminary near Dublin, for two and a half years, graduating with a BA degree instead of going on for the priesthood. Pine says Friel is "reluctant to discuss this period of his development in which he was dismayed by the revelation of Irish Catholicism which it afforded" (17). Returning to Derry for the year of 1948-49, he then attended Saint Joseph's Teacher Training College in Belfast for a year and came back to teach in primary and intermediate schools in Derry for the next ten years. This period of decision in Friel's life suggests another fragmentation in his personality. Even in the unlikely event that the decision entailed no emotional conflict, it nevertheless brought home to him a basic division in the Irish mind, and one that runs throughout his plays, the opposition between the spiritual and the worldly, between religion and intellectuality, the soul and the mind.

During these ten years Friel divided his time between two careers: teaching and writing. His first published story, "The Child,"

which appeared in *The Bell* in 1952, reveals in only 780 words the gift, which has never deserted Friel, of conveying a mood and a complexity of emotions in few words. The story evokes the warmth and security a child feels as he lies in bed in darkness, hearing his mother in the kitchen below going about her customary tasks. The mood changes rapidly when the father comes home; the child experiences a tension that approaches hysteria when he hears his parents arguing and fears they will fight. In this first story Friel's theme of the autocratic father and the intimidated child emerges.

The year 1960 marks Friel's turn to full-time writing. He continued to live in Derry, however, until 1967 when he settled with his family in Muff and later in Greencastle. Both lie on the coast of Inishowen peninsula--at the northernmost tip of Ireland, but in the Republic. Friel remains involved in the political and cultural life of Derry. He was present for a Civil Rights march on October 5, 1968, which was first banned, then used for a display of police force when marchers defied the ban. He also witnessed the events of "Bloody Sunday," January 30, 1972, which are the basis of *The Freedom of the City.*

Many of Friel's plays have premiered in Derry, the home of the Field Day Theatre Company. He continues to face daily the political, geographic, and symbolic division of his country--the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. He has also become increasingly active in Irish affairs and is the first writer since Yeats to be appointed to the Irish senate. He was elected to the Irish Academy of Letters in 1972. In 1982 he became a member of

Irish Academy of Letters in 1972. In 1982 he became a member of Aosdana, the national treasury of Irish artists, and received an honorary D. Litt. from the National University of Ireland.

As Pine has observed, "The city of Derry and its natural hinterland in Donegal constitute a total environment from which Friel draws not just his inspiration but his messages" (39). Friel's plays are always squarely situated in real places. Most of them take place in Ballybeg, County Donegal. "Ballybeg" is an invented name from the Irish "baile beag," meaning "small town," but it is not a vague, unspecific place. Firmly rooted in Donegal, it contains the conflicting issues of the country and the city, the past and the present, the imagined and the real, the desired and the possessed.

Eudora Welty has pointed out the importance of a sense of place in a writer's work. Her comments explain why Friel depends on the familiar landscape of his birth for the settings of his plays. As Welty says, the more precisely a place is described, the more universal it becomes:

> The moment the place . . . is accepted as true, through it will begin to glow, in a kind of recognizable glory, the feeling and thought that inhabited the novel in the author's head and animated the whole of his work. . . . People give pain, are callous and insensitive, empty and cruel, carrying with them no pasts as they promise no futures. But place heals the hurt, soothes the outrage, fills the terrible vacuum that these human beings make. It heals actively, and the response is given consciously, with the ardent care and explicitness, respect and delight of a lover, when fishing streams or naming over streets becomes almost something of the lover's secret language. (131)

Welty's last phrase has particular relevance for Friel's plays,

especially *Faith Healer* and *Translations,* where the ritual naming over of places becomes a special language. As I discuss the specific cultural context of a play, I also attempt to show how Friel's treatment has given the context broader application.

The context varies, of course, from play to play. Most plays are multicontextual. Furthermore, Friel's early works explore themes he later expands into more definitive statements. For example, *The Enemy Within* and *Crystal and Fox* investigate the difficult decision a person faces when he must choose between his "calling" and his allegiance to home, clan, and country. *Faith Healer* explores the ultimate sacrifice he must make when he chooses. Friel develops this theme through three different, yet paradoxically related, characters--a monk, a travelling entertainer, and a faith healer. Likewise, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* looks at the opposition between authority and love in terms of a father-son conflict; *Living Quarters* explores this theme further in a family situation involving daughters as well; and *Aristocrats* combines the theme with the reality-illusion dichotomy of earlier plays. Themes and contexts easily outstrip chronological order in importance. Therefore I have grouped the plays according to cultural context and thematic conflict with only secondary attention to chronology.

It is a convenient truism that great literature is born of conflict. Adherents of this doctrine can point convincingly to the group of Southern writers, led by William Faulkner, who face the conflicts of a divided South--divided by race, economic change, the overturning of traditional values, and the wrenching guilt and fears

of a crumbling society. Important writers of revolutionary Russia serve equally well as an example. So do Jewish writers coming to terms with Holocaust and displacement, South African writers, Black American writers, women writers; the list goes on. No better example of a literature born of conflict exists than Irish writing, from Yeats's Irish Revival to contemporary literature of the new Irish Renaissance. No writer could be better acquainted with the Irish struggle than Brian Friel.

The temptation to read his work purely as a discussion of Irish conflicts has at times been strong. Many of his critics have cried out for Friel to be more political, more outspoken on the "troubles," more "Irish," while others have urged him to be less political. Richard Kearney cites Brian McEvera of the Belfast magazine *Fortnight* as a typical example of the latter. McEvera says, "Friel's work is directly political in its implications, and its 'awareness' is one-sided. The 'shape' observed is a nationalist one--and a limited partial view of nationalism at that." McEvera hopes that "the more overt political element will disappear from [Friel's] work" (qtd. in Kearney "Language Play" 510). Kearney disagrees:

> Several of Friel's later plays do indeed have a political content--in the sense that they address the nature of Irish nationalist ideology in both its historical and contemporary guises. But they do so in a way that is profoundly anti-propagandist. ("Language Play" 510)

Many of Friel's fellow countrymen would have him be more profoundly propagandist. Friel is well aware of the danger to the writer of being too emotionally involved in affairs of the moment.

In 1972 when the eruption of violence in Derry so stunned Friel that he wrote his most political play, he also spoke his strongest plea for the detachment of the artist:

> In each of us the line between the Irish mind and the creative mind is much too fine. . . . There must be a far greater distinction between the Irishman who suffers and the artist's mind which creates. . . . The intensity of the emotion we all feel for our country (and in the present climate that emotion is heightened) is not of itself the surest foundation for the best drama, which, as Eliot says, comes from "the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place." ("Plays Peasant" 305)

Thus, Friel's dilemma emerges--the problem of the artist in a fractured society. The conflicts of the society may supply the impetus that makes him a writer. The conflicts in the hearts of his people, leading to conflicts in his own heart, give him the agony out of which springs his need to write. But as an artist he knows he must address larger questions than those of his immediate time and place. Not only must Friel draw inspiration and material from a disjointed country and a schizophrenic society, he must face within himself a perpetual conflict. If he writes political drama, he betrays his calling as an artist. If he writes about other places and other subjects, he loses the particularity of a familiar place, that sense of immediacy that enables him to universalize his themes. If he ignores the Northern Irish conflict, he feels he has deserted and betrayed his countrymen. Speaking for Ireland and to Ireland from his position has not been, and never will be, easy.

CHAPTER II
FORCES AND FORM IN FRIEL'S DRAMA

The relationship of a literature to a society is always complex. In the case of Ireland, the problems are particularly profuse. I do not propose to attempt an overview of Irish history nor an analysis of Ireland's difficulties. Such an attempt would be not only far beyond the scope of this study but also far above my competence to undertake it. However, some preliminary ground needs to be cleared--or at least surveyed.

Getting inside a writer's mind and understanding a culture from some remote point on another continent might seem impossible endeavors. So they would be, were it not for several mitigating factors. The first is Friel's persistent and obliging habit of giving his plays a universal application. Second, his ability to recreate accurately the experience of his Irish characters affords, as does all good literature, the best way to understand another part of the world. The shrinking nature of today's world accelerates the tendency of events in one corner to spill over into other areas. Civil Rights agitation in Derry, for example, which led to Bloody Sunday, had its roots in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and was part of the climate of human rights awareness that encompassed the world at that time. As I look at Ireland's problems, I am frequently reminded of the similarity between the position of Irish people with regard to the jealously held "superiority" of

England, and the position of American Blacks in the South with regard to the "supremacy" of the entrenched white culture, a situation of which I have first-hand knowledge. When I contemplate what Friel and other Field Day writers have to say about how language and myths shape our perception of the world, my mind shifts to the way Western culture has been shaped largely by masculine thinking and writing. These factors, and others that point to the important place Ireland occupies in the global picture, encourage me to investigate the context of Friel's plays and attempt to understand the cultural background from which he writes.

As a colonized state emerging into nationhood, Ireland has attracted global attention. Richard Ned Lebow in *White Britain and Black Ireland* (1976), studies the "phenomenon of colonialism" from a twentieth-century perspective to "illuminate the causes for Britain's failure in Ireland." He attempts to "relate the lessons of Ireland to other countries and other colonial relationships" (1-3). Breen, Hannan, Rottman, and Whelan (1990) study the Republic of Ireland as "a country which industrialized late and rapidly," and shares with "other countries on the European periphery, such as Greece and Spain . . . the sometimes uneasy intermingling of elements of tradition and modernity." Because of its "long history of political and economic domination by a colonial power," Ireland can also be compared with developing Third World countries. "These dual parallels make Ireland unique as a testing ground for ideas concerning the development process and its consequences" (xi).

The greatest amount of ink and film has been expended in documenting the "troubles" in the North. Both Heslinga (1971) and Pringle (1985) study the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic as a cultural divide and weigh the possibilities of Ireland's being unified. In 1975 Joseph Browne observed that "everyone who writes of the hatred and violence in Northern Ireland, and of the resultant destruction, agony and despair, has certainly implied that the jeremiad will go terrifyingly on and on" (109). Although there have been many developments since then, some of them encouraging, events in the opening months of 1992, involving stepped-up terrorist activities by the Irish Republican Army and retaliation by Unionists, show that the conflict is far from settled. The climate of violence that exists makes it understandable that members of the intellectual community of Northern Ireland regard the situation as a crisis which they must do what they can to alleviate. An additional burden falls upon their shoulders in light of theories advanced by scholars who stress the importance of intellectuals in shaping the political history of a people.

Language and Images

These theories grow from ideas advanced by the italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who in 1916 argued: "Man is above all else mind, consciousness" (qtd. in Boggs 59), and for any social change to take place, the people must have a consciousness of the possibility of change. In order for any class or people to be liberated, Gramsci argued, they must create a "'counter-hegemony' to combat the

hegemony, or ideological control, of the dominant class (or colonizer)." The creation of this counter-hegemony must be "carried out by the individuals who [sic] Gramsci labels the intellectuals" (Cairns and Richards 13). Also basic to modern political theories is Jacques Lacan's idea that the moment an infant gazes at itself in a mirror is an "identification . . . namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (2). The importance of a nation's consciousness or image of itself finds expression in the political theories of Louis Althusser.

Building on Gramsci and Lacan, Althusser argues that power cannot be maintained by repressive force alone, but must rest on control of what he calls "Ideological State Apparatuses"--social institutions which embrace such areas as religion, culture, education, and family relations, and function by "ideology" (*Lenin* 145). In order for any political change to take place, "a new consciousness" must be produced in the subjects (*For Marx* 151). A constant struggle goes on in any society to "interpellate" individuals into certain groups and into accepting particular outlooks upon life, society, and history. The primary cultural means through which individuals are interpellated and through which new consciousnesses are created is discourse. Thus, Michel Foucault insists that discourses are "practises that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (*Archeology* 49), and "discourse is the power which is to be seized" ("Order" 53). While these theories impute great power to the intellectual and creative segments of a population, they also place upon them tremendous responsibility. An

awareness of this challenge and this responsibility lies behind the formation of Field Day and behind the activities of many of Northern Ireland's writers and critics.

Ireland has a number of distinct characteristics, many of which are shared by other colonized countries.[3] It has a "native" population and an "implanted" population: one descended from the Catholic Gaels, the other from the Protestant planters. Religious, cultural, and political animosities between the two run deep. Pine points out that the issues of "possession and dispossession, mastery and servility, alienation and exile" have "crystallised in the stereotypes of the 'Planter' and the 'Gael'" (40).

Ireland also has a native language still spoken by some people in the Gaeltacht and other remote areas (including New York City), but supplanted by English, the practical choice for participation in world affairs. Yet many Irish still chafe at being forced to use a language that is not their own. Tom Paulin argues that the English language spoken in Ireland has no dictionary (such as American English has, for instance), and thus many spoken Irish words are "homeless": "It is a language without a lexicon, a language without form. Like some strange creature of the open air, it exists simply as *Geist* or spirit" (11). Paulin argues for the connection between a language and a national culture, reminding us that the history of a language is "often a story of . . . territorial struggle and the establishment or imposition of a culture" (3). Seamus Deane agrees,

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[3]See for example Csilla Bertha, "Tragedies of National Fate: A Comparison between Brian Friel's *Translations* and its Hungarian Counterpart, András Sütó's *A szuzai menyegzó.*"

arguing that language partly expresses, but also partly creates, cultural notions as to who is civilized and who is barbarian ("Civilians" 33-42). The influence of Gramsci, Althusser, and Foucault is clear in these statements. These ideas find expression in all Friel's plays. Their force is especially evident in *Translations,* his play about the loss of the Gaelic language and Celtic traditions.

The Irish Mind

One of the legacies of the ancient Celtic world is the Irish personality. Even if some of the characteristics of the Irish mind are fictions of the Irish imagination, they are worth looking at for what they tell us about the image the Irish have of themselves. An understanding of the Irish mind is also valuable for what it reveals about the source of Friel's fragmented characters.

Most writers agree that the Irish have been from earliest times a romantic, fanciful, highly imaginative people. Nora Chadwick comments on the "astonishing richness and variety" of Celtic tales and on the "ascendancy of the imagination and fancy over the world of logic" (273, 264). Kenneth Hurlston Jackson, translator of *A Celtic Miscellany,* says the most outstanding characteristic of Celtic literatures is their astonishing power of imagination (20). Kuno Meyer in his *Introduction to the Ancient Irish Poetry* comments on the Celts' love of nature "in its tiniest phenomena as in its grandest," and says that, like the Japanese, "they avoid the commonplace; the half-said thing . . . is dearest"

(qtd. in Chadwick 257). Sean O'Faolain describes the Celts as wildly romantic, saying their "racial imagination has, from the start, got out of control." Their "sense of the Otherworld has dominated their imagination." O'Faolain sees them

> struggling, through century after century, seeking for a synthesis between dream and reality, aspiration and experience, a shrewd knowledge of the world and a strange reluctance to cope with it, and tending always to find the balance not in an intellectual synthesis but in the rhythm of a perpetual emotional oscillation. (3-4)

In *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction,* John Wilson Foster observes a similar oscillation in mood, which he says "seems to be part of the Irish character itself." Discussing the novels of the Ulster writer William Carleton (1794-1869), Foster claims that "a continuity from Carleton to the present exists in Ulster fiction because many of the shaping forces of Northern Irish society have not startlingly altered since his day" (1). Characteristics mentioned by Foster are also noted by O'Faolain and appear in Friel's plays.

Foster says Carleton wrote of "pathos and humour" as the "two levers by which the Irish character is raised or depressed," and describes mood swings between "grotesque and clamorous grief" and "that rough, blunt satire and mirth so keenly relished by the peasantry." Carleton often remarks on the spontaneity of Irish grief and joy, a characteristic incorporated in James Joyce's portmanteau word *funferall.* In the fertile Irish imagination, dream and fantasy take over, Foster says, in treatments of death and sex, "the two subjects which set the emotional pendulum swinging most amply."

Sex is treated either as sentimental romance or as grotesque; death is a matter for self-indulgent pathos or the macabre. The Irish continually seek by these extremes to purge their fear of death but remain greatly preoccupied with it. Other swings in Irish temperament observed by Foster are from depression to manic energy, from love, affection, and sacrifice to violence, savagery, and superstition. The fiddle, which represents dancing and mirth, alternates with the harp, associated with heroism, sacrifice, and death (12-14).

Friel's fragmented characters have their roots in these Irish contraries. His characters often show rapid mood swings between pathos and humor, but rather than presenting this characteristic as an irrational anomaly of the Irish character, Friel provides reasons for the oscillations within the fragmented psyches of his characters who are victims of personal or public pressures clearly related to the Irish situation. Seamus Deane speaks of the Irish temperament as "an enhanced feature of a people who are bedevilled by failure and compensate for it by making out of their own instability a mode of behavior in which volatility becomes a virtue and a style" (Introduction *Plays* 12).

A new approach to the question of the Irish mind is observed by Pine, who says the "Irish intellectual tradition, long dismissed or devalued as a twilit irresponsible reverie upon misfortune, has, however, recently received serious critical attention" (36). Pine quotes Richard Kearney:

> Could it be that the Irish mind, in its various expressions often flew in the face of logocentrism by showing that meaning is not only determined by a logic that centralises and censors but also by a logic which disseminates: a structured dispersal exploring what is *other,* what is irreducibly diverse. In contra-distinction to the orthodox dualist logic of *either/or,* the Irish mind may be seen to favour a more didactical logic of *both/and,* an intellectual ability to hold the traditional oppositions of classical reason held together in creative confluence. (Introduction 9, qtd. in Pine 36)

To what extent these dualistic qualities are inherent racial characteristics and to what extent they are the result of extraneous forces becomes increasingly a matter of debate as we move toward the colonial period in Ireland's history. Whatever its source, the divided nature of the Irish mind and its ability and tendency to hold opposite emotions and ideas provide a cultural context that is extremely useful in a study of Brian Friel's plays. One of the paramount examples of the Irish mind's ability to contain opposites lies in its tendency to blend pagan and Christian beliefs. Sometimes pagan and Christian merge and coexist harmoniously, as in Synge's play *Riders to the Sea.* In Friel's plays they often clash, but he seems to prefer to maintain a precarious balance between the two, suggesting that neither should be allowed control. This ambiguity often frustrates attempts to find neat resolutions to his plays.

Pagan and Christian

Under the influence of Christianity, the Irish mind took on a "stern Christian morality," but underneath this surface, there remains a "joyous pagan amorality" (O'Faolain 18). The conflict is

symbolized by the "dialogues" between the legendary Celtic hero Oisín and the austere Christian priest St. Patrick. David Krause observes that an Irish archetypal motif--the dialectic between a sacred priest and a profane jester--originated in these mock heroic debates (53). Oisín, having lived a supernaturally long life into the fifth century, is an old man when he encounters St. Patrick. Krause believes the Irish people

> felt the need to project their unfulfilled dreams through the *persona* of a once heroic but now comically absurd figure of fallen glory. . . . When the mythological Oisín collided with the historical Patrick, the world of imagination scored a vicarious triumph over the world of fact (61).

Sometimes the Celtic hero resists Patrick's attempts at conversion and chooses Hell; sometimes he is converted, but comically, as when Patrick, in baptizing Oisín, accidentally drives his crozier through Oisín's foot. The old pagan does not cry out, assuming that foot-piercing is part of this quaint Christian ceremony. In the *Agallamh Oisín agus Padraig* ("Dialogue between Oisín and Patrick"), Patrick becomes hard and vindictive in his efforts to convert the now blind and childlike Oisín. Thus Patrick becomes a comic villain and the audience's sympathy goes to the pagan scapegoat:

> It is the humorously profane and naive manner in which the aged Oisín dreams of his past Dionysian glories and refuses to be converted by the ascetic Patrick that allows him to circumvent if not overcome the Apollonian rigors of the new dispensation. (Krause 22)

Krause points out that far from endangering the Christian faith, this mockery merely proved that the position of Patrick and the church was secure enough to be laughed at (61). Thus the Irish comic spirit like the Irish imagination not only survived from the early dawn of Celtic civilization through the Christianizing influence of St. Patrick and other priests and monks, but seemed to thrive on the stimulation of opposition.

Although Krause is concerned only with the comic aspects of the debate between the sacred and the profane, or between orthodox Christian doctrine and pagan heresy, the battle raged on other levels as well. O'Faolain cites reference in the letters of St. Jerome to "an ignorant calumniator . . . full of Irish porridge" who had the insolence to criticize him (43). This man was Pelagius, founder of Pelagianism, who rejected the doctrine of original sin and believed that "human beings, with their unaided will power, are capable of achieving spiritual good" (Krause 30). Hence he also rejected the teachings of St. Augustine on free will and grace (O'Faolain 43). Krause believes that "Pelagius might well be qualified to serve as the mock patron saint of Irish comedy" (31).

Krause thus establishes the division between comedy and tragedy as between Manichean and Pelagian doctrines:

> The tragic figure in his Manichean isolation must face the truth without any subterfuges or sublimations; the comic figure in his Pelagian independence must use subterfuges and sublimations to bend the truth to his own purposes (30).

What Krause has further established is the essential similarity

between comedy and tragedy that lies in the fact that both require at least a temporary suspension of faith in a rational and just power controlling the affairs of man. In tragicomic drama like Friel's, audiences must submit to the willing suspension of belief and abandon themselves to the ritualistic nature of ancient forms of drama.

The clash of pagan and Christian views is a recurring theme in Friel's plays, beginning with his earliest successful play, *The Enemy Within,* and continuing through his most recent Broadway hit, *Dancing at Lughnasa.* Both Krause and Friel recognize that Celtic Ireland lives lustily on, sometimes only partially covered with a thin veneer of Christianity.

Irishness and Englishness

In *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture,* David Cairns and Shaun Richards observe that a number of events and forces converged at the end of the fifteenth century to cause the English to devote themselves not to uniting with the people of Ireland, incorporating or assimilating their culture, but to "breaking" them and eliminating the Celtic culture. As a result of the loss of Calais in 1558, ending the dreams of English kings to rebuild Henry V's continental empire, a narrower sense of "Englishness" emerged. This narrower definition of Englishness may be traced also to the Reformation, with its fragmentation of Christendom, and to rapid overseas expansion.

Furthermore, Michel Foucault has argued that a change in the mode of acquiring knowledge--the *episteme*--caused the English to define themselves in a different way. Prior to the sixteenth century, the pre-classical *episteme* was based upon resemblances and finding similarities and affinities. "The fundamental supposition was that of a total system of correspondence (earth and sky, planets and faces, microcosm and macrocosm) and each particular similitude was then lodged within this overall relation" (*Order of Things* 55). The later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the development of the classical *episteme,* in which the acquisition of knowledge was based upon differences. Thus "Englishness" came to be defined by simultaneously defining "non-Englishness" or "otherness."

Cairns and Richards argue that this classical *episteme* influenced Edmund Spenser in his view that the Irish were not a similar race that could be reformed, "their culture and customs being merely surface features overlaying a basic humanity," but that they were "a barbaric race who must be broken by famine and the sword before they can be remade as biddable and law-abiding." He saw the refusal of the Irish to conform to what he regarded as superior English practices, especially their refusal to accept Protestantism, as proof of their barbarity. He regarded the "Old English"--settlers who had been assimilated into the Irish culture--as polluted, and believed the "New English"--settlers of Spenser's day--must resist assimilating the Irish for fear that they too would become polluted. The Irish must therefore "have their cultural

vitality maimed in order to remove the threat of cultural pollution, but they must remain as 'other' in order to make possible the fashioning of 'Englishness' and to labour for the New English" (4-6).

Beginning with the sixteenth century, then, the English tried to divide the Irish or Celts from them, to establish incontrovertibly that the Celts were not only a different race, but a vastly inferior one. Declan Kiberd says:

> The English did not invade Ireland--rather, they seized a neighbouring island and invented the idea of Ireland. The notion "Ireland" is largely a fiction created by the rulers of England in response to specific needs at a precise moment in British history. The English have always presented themselves to the world as a cold, refined and urbane race, so it suited them to see the Irish as hot-headed, rude and garrulous--the perfect foil to set off British virtues. ("Anglo-Irish" 83)

Kiberd points out that the opposite is also true: "The Irish notion of 'England' is a fiction created and inhabited by the Irish for their own pragmatic purposes" (83).

G. J. Watson cites instances of the Irish portrayed as less than human--as chimpanzees and apes--in English nineteenth-century writing and cartoons. The stereotyped Irishman, "Paddy the Ape, violent, drunken, poor, superstitious," had emerged (17). This image of themselves as inferior became entrenched in Irish minds as well. Furthermore, it was during this time that the Irish lost their native language and hence their national literature. English dominance over Ireland robbed the Irish of their self-respect, their pride, and ultimately their identity. So deeply ingrained was the Irish sense of inferiority that we find Charles Haughey, Taoiseach or Prime

Minister of the Republic, saying as recently as 1981:

> We were for such a long time only England's back garden. A civil servant would sit in his office in Dublin all his life. Now he's going to Brussels, meeting other Europeans, finding he can perform at the same level. This has strengthened our confidence. (Putnam 469)

The Irish need a vision of peace. They need to replace the present atmosphere of violence that exists in Northern Ireland with a new perspective on the "troubles." D. G. Pringle points out that

> it is important to remember that many of those actively involved in paramilitary activities are not old enough to remember the relatively peaceful times before 1968. As in Vietnam, a whole generation has been reared in a culture in which violence is an accepted part of normality: memories of past aggressions are long lasting and call out for revenge; peace is a much more difficult concept. (2)

While Pringle's position is that Ireland is not one nation, but two, and that the people of Ulster and the people of the Republic do not share a common heritage, a belief persists among many Irish that the island must be unified, and that reminding Irishmen of the history and culture they have in common may help bridge the divisions created by the present crisis. This belief prompted the foundation of the Field Day Theatre Company.

Field Day

Field Day was founded in 1980, as we have seen, by Friel and Stephen Rea. Before the first production of the Field Day Theatre Company (Friel's *Translations*), poet Seamus Heaney, critic and poet

Seamus Deane, folk singer and broadcaster David Hammond, and writer-critic Tom Paulin had joined Friel and Rea in the enterprise and had expanded the scope of its activities to include publishing. The six directors believed that Field Day "could and should contribute to the solution of the present crisis by producing analyses of the established opinions, myths and stereotypes which had become both a symptom and a cause of the current situation" (Field Day vii).

Eric Binnie sees parallels between Field Day and Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble. Although he admits that Friel's plays are too diverse in form to be compared to Brecht's dialectical theatre, he sees similarities in the origins of both theatres on border locations--Brecht's on the border between East and West Germany, where he could "exploit each side's fears and suspicions of the other in ways which were, ultimately, uniquely creative," Friel's on the Irish border between North and South, where he could create a "shared context . . . an artistic 'fifth province,' . . . which would neither accept the North/South division nor ignore the separate traditional strengths of those on either side" (365-66).

Although Field Day Theatre Company cannot be considered an ensemble,

> there is still a remarkable element of continuity . . . a consistency of purpose--to challenge accepted notions, to counteract lethargy or despair, to make Irish men and women more aware of their own responsibilities and potentiality, to create open-ended speculation, and to do so with wit and style. (Binnie 368)

Friel and Rea are closely involved in all the theatre company's productions. With a small budget raised from the Arts Councils of both Northern Ireland and the Republic, Field Day has managed to commission one new play each year since its founding. The plays are first presented in Derry's Guildhall on an improvised stage. They then tour "to every variety of make-shift venue, before audiences at every level of theatrical experience, holding diverse political or religious persuasions, and living on both sides of the border" (Binnie 368).

The company has been especially interested in encouraging young dramatists. Thomas Kilroy, whose play *Double Cross* was presented by Field Day in 1985, asserts in the preface to the published text of the play that it could not have been written without Field Day. He describes the company as "the most important movement of its kind in Ireland since the beginning of this century," adding: "It has provided a platform for the life of the mind, of whatever persuasion, at a time when mindlessness threatens to engulf us all" (qtd. in Binnie 369-70).

On December 11 and 12, 1991, Friel joined Deane, Heaney, and Hammond in a two-part interview on National Public Radio from New York. The occasion was the publication of the three-volume *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing.* This massive collection spans almost fifteen centuries, from AD 600 to the present, and includes prose, poetry, plays, songs, political speeches, and editorials from Irish newspapers. It includes works originally written in Latin, Gaelic, and English.

During the interview, Heaney, Deane, and Friel emphasized that a strong impression exists among the Irish that Ireland is a dispossessed nation, in grave danger of losing its culture, just as it has lost its language. The anthology was created to identify and preserve that culture. Rather than seeing anything genetic in the Irishman's skill as storyteller, the Field Day editors believe that storytelling is a natural result of living in a culture that "has had enforced upon it the need to tell a story that will make sense of its past." In Heaney's words:

> If the past has been, in the view of the storyteller or tellers, broken, ruptured in some way, the attempt to knit things together through stories, through a narrative, becomes not just some kind of fabulous spinning of a yarn, but actually becomes a way of trying to hold on to the idea of coherence in the midst of incoherence. (Appendix D 348)

If Field Day expressly proposes to recapture the past in order to reestablish in the Irish a sense of who they are, my interpretation of Friel's plays as attempts to dispel the illusions the Irish have about themselves by demystifying their mythological past may appear contradictory and wrong-headed. Yet it is precisely from this contradiction that Friel's ambiguity springs. Ireland is a culture in transition--a culture trying to look to the past and the future simultaneously. According to its editors, the anthology has been created to invent a tradition. Seamus Deane:

> What we're saying is that the invention of a tradition is what anthologies are about, and colonial cultures more than national and state cultures need that capacity to invent, to be creative,

> to commit to full possession that which has been in some ways denied them. (Appendix D 349)

Yet Deane has just described the anthology as "so heterogeneous--so dyslexic" that nobody, "no matter how monocular or bigoted," can discover a central tradition in it: "There is no metaphysical ghost of Irishness haunting these pages" (Appendix D 349).

Furthermore, the invention of a tradition seems to conflict with the stated aim of Field Day to analyze the opinions, myths, and stereotypes that contribute to the present conflict. Such an analysis would seem to imply a rejection or at least a rethinking of these elements of Irish culture rather than a preservation of them in an anthology. Although these two goals appear contradictory, both are necessary in an emerging nation. The fragmentation so evident in Friel's work comes partly from this divided direction.

Ireland remains a country that has yet to discover its own image, its sense of national identity, precisely because it is divided in its past experience. If the Irish hope to find a single national image, they must look to the future. They must recognize the heterogeneity of their past and seek to build a unified nation upon an acknowledgment of this fragmented past. Otherwise, they will linger in a twilight of memory and regret over some irreparable loss and will fail to grasp the promise of the future. This seems to me to be the message of all Friel's plays.

In addition to the anthology, the company has published Heaney's version of the tale of Suibhne Geilt, *Sweeney Astray*, and twelve pamphlets with such titles as "Civilians and Barbarians,"

"Myth and Motherland," "Dynasties of Coercion," and "The Apparatus of Repression." In keeping with their intent to encourage discussion and end "mindless obedience to any one cause," the editors invited Denis Donoghue to provide an afterword to the publication of the first six pamphlets in one volume, and his comments were far from laudatory.

The Field Day enterprise has not been without its detractors. Criticism has been expressed by Edna Longley in "Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland." She begins with a quotation from Yeats:

> The antagonist of imaginative writing in Ireland is not a habit of scientific observation but our interest in matters of opinion. . . . All fine literature is the disinterested contemplation or expression of life, but hardly any Irish writer can liberate his mind sufficiently from questions of practical reform for this contemplation. Art for Art's sake . . . seems to him a neglect of public duty. It is as though the telegraph-boys botanised among the hedges with the undelivered envelopes in their pockets.[4]

Longley is especially critical of Deane for his position that poetry should be politically involved. She cites a 1975 statement that she says he has never altered: "Northern Ireland is in political crisis and Northern poets seem more remote from it than any other group, even when they are not writing poetry--which in some cases is seldom."[5] She claims he tried to "lick [Heaney] into political shape" by asking in an interview:

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[4]*Explorations* (New York: Macmillan, 1962) qtd. in Longley 185.

[5]"Irish Poetry and Irish Nationalism," *Two Decades of Irish Writing,* ed. Douglas Dunn (Carcanet, 1975) 14, qtd. in Longley 196.

> Do you think that if some political stance is not adopted by you and the Northern poets at large, this refusal might lead to a dangerous strengthening of . . . the autonomy of poetry and corroborate the recent English notion of the happy limitations of a "well-made poem"? (qtd. in Longley 196)

She also disapproves of Deane and Paulin's "structuralist levelling-word 'discourse,'" saying "it abolishes any boundary between poetry and prose, poetry and politics, in the same spirit as 'comrade' abolishes class-distinctions" (197).

In addition, she finds much fault with Paulin and Deane in their argument for the recognition of an Irish English. To her credit, she admits that an Irish English exists in Heaney's poetry, but she claims that the use of certain words that are supposed to be Ulster Scots idiom is "almost racist." Her argument reminds one of arguments in this country over "Black English." Such usages are not racist, it seems, if the minority involved instigates the use. Friel's position on the issue of Irish English is clear in his translation of Chekhov's *The Three Sisters,* which "avoids the many fine English versions and attempts to make the play accessible to his audience by using identifiably Irish forms of English speech" (Binnie 366).

Longley's complaint that the word "discourse" erases the dividing line between poetry and prose seems irrelevant. We have known for a long time that that line is at best hazy. As for the line between poetry and politics, straddling that one is particularly difficult for a dramatist. Deane, in fact, has said that Friel is "more bluntly and openly involved in the whole crisis than Heaney or [Derek] Mahon" because of the more public form of the drama

("Writer" 14). We have seen Friel's comments on the necessity of a writer's remaining uninvolved in political affairs, but we shall see him propelled into involvement by the events of the early 1970s. When it comes to the line between politics and literary criticism, Longley, and Deane and Paulin too, for that matter, have proved that that line is nonexistent.

Yeats's assessment, quoted above, is squarely on target and accurately describes Friel's dilemma. The first three plays I discuss show Friel facing the question of what role the creative artist must play in any society. The artist/writer must make choices. He must walk the narrow path, always vigilant, always aware of the political turmoil and the cultural flux around him, but transmuting the sludge of life into the finer metal of art. This study attempts to determine how successful Friel has been in his efforts to keep his creative eye on timeless concerns and universal values at the same time that he works for change in Ireland.

Friel's Choice of Form

Friel uses Ireland's culture as the clay from which he fashions a map of his country's future. Yet while his plays respond to Irish problems and provide insights into peculiarly Irish conflicts, they also give international audiences a clearer understanding of their own problems. This has always been Friel's purpose. D. E. S. Maxwell quotes him as saying in 1970:

> I would like . . . to write a play that would capture the peculiar spiritual, and indeed material flux, that this country is in at

> the moment. This has got to be done, for me anyway, at a local, parochial level, and hopefully this will have meaning for other people in other countries.[6]

In 1989 Christopher Murray observed that Friel has followed this plan: "Friel's work has remained consistent in its concentration on local affairs, construed as having general or universal implications." Friel's plays, rather than forming "a continuous line of development," are responses to "what could loosely be called the Zeitgeist":

> Personal and public events interact to establish pressures on the dramatic artist to "speak out," but he does not so much speak out as find (in Eliot's phrase) an objective correlative for certain moods and feelings. (Murray "Friel and After" 13-14)

As Seamus Deane puts it: "His plays are constantly . . . leaning towards parable or allegory, precisely because we know there is a line of demarcation where the 'character' stops and the 'author' begins, between . . . enactment and meaning" ("Writer" 15).

Frederick S. Kiley's comments in his review of Thomas Kinsella's *New Poems 1973* aptly apply to Friel's work. Kiley says Kinsella's verse "does not pretend to offer comforting reasons for the anguish of mortality":

> Instead of craftily holding off until a moment of dramatic crisis and then charging forth with a resolution of easy abstraction that promises to overwhelm every problem in sight, Kinsella prefers to embody whatever shred of answer or illusion there might be in the form of the question. When all is

[6]Qtd. in Maxwell 109. The quotation is from the *Irish Times,* 12 Feb 1970: 14.

> stripped away, the act remains, naked, raw, vulnerable, dumb. (151)

Kiley speaks of Kinsella's "brilliant execution" of this method, pointing out how Kinsella approximates classical Greek when one of his poems, "unveiling the horror of how the worst things we do in life are done without our knowing in a kind of damned innocence, edges toward Sophoclean despair." He concludes the review by describing *New Poems* as the "developing art of a man who grows steadily toward his masterpiece" (151). All these comments fit Friel's work. In the hilarity of his plays, when we watch the antics of a Gar O'Donnell (*Philadelphia*), a Casimir (*Aristocrats*), or a Maggie (*Lughnasa*), we might deny that Friel ever approaches Sophoclean despair. But beneath the humor is Friel's hope for Ireland, and it sometimes verges on despair.

Beyond the present "troubles,"--one is tempted to say *ever*-present troubles--Ireland retains a sense of continuity and a haunting awareness of another world impervious to change. This world is built on a combination of deep Catholic faith in a life after this one and a persistent pagan sense of "the other"--a world of spirits and forces existing in rocks and trees, mountains and glens, thinly veiled from sight, but exerting unpredictable influence on the world of humans. These two views of life parallel opposing views of tragedy. In the Catholic faith, tragedy is tragedy because man does not understand the mysterious ways of God. In the pagan sense of "the other," tragedy moves into the realm where reason and justice are suspended and blind fate or animal instincts prevail. Both views

operate in Friel's unusual dramatic form.

Friel's choice of form follows his choice of purpose. If a writer is working for reconciliation in a disrupted society, he does not choose satire or denunciatory drama. Where people are at a fever pitch of disagreement, when too many voices are crying their causes, the best touch is a light one and the best choice of form is comedy. On the other hand, a dramatist writing in Northern Ireland is bound to be acutely aware of the tragedies occurring there daily. He could hardly avoid a sense of the irony inherent in a situation where people of the same race and nationality, living in the same small island, kill each other in the name of religion. When Friel presents the fragmented personalities of his troubled country, he uses a dramatic form that combines comedy and tragedy to reveal this irony.

For an understanding of Friel's choice of form, we look to Tyrone Guthrie, George Steiner, David Krause, and Northrop Frye. Friel began his playwriting career with a season in Minneapolis in 1963 with that "Giant of Monaghan," as Friel called him (*Holiday* 35.5, 89), and giant of the theatrical world, Sir Tyrone Guthrie. Guthrie was a friend, a fellow Ulsterman, and in many ways a mentor. Friel watched the rehearsals of *Hamlet* and Anton Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* at what was to become the Tyrone Guthrie Memorial Theatre. From this experience came his first important success, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Next came the companion piece to *Philadelphia, The Loves of Cass McGuire,* which Guthrie was preparing to produce, at Friel's invitation, when Guthrie

died in 1971. Later Friel translated Chekhov's play into Irish English. Guthrie's theories had great impact on Friel's emerging dramatic sense.

Guthrie discusses these theories in his book *In Various Directions* in a chapter entitled "Theatre as Ritual." Briefly, Guthrie believes that all drama is religious because it derives from prehistoric festivals of worship growing out of ceremonies of human sacrifice. As humankind lost its tolerance for human sacrifice, and subsequently for animal sacrifice, it began to enact symbolic dramas--tragedies--in which a hero, as sacrificial victim, suffers or dies. Guthrie believes that we, like the ancient Athenians, have a "sneaking belief in many gods" because we cannot "shake off the primitive and polytheistic beliefs which we have inherited" (26, 28). Of Greek tragedy he says, "Though an evident injustice on the part of God to man is implied, it is made clear that the injustice only appears so from a human standpoint," because "we, with our limited vision, by the feeble light of human intelligence, are unable to discern our origin and must proceed blindly toward our darkly incomprehensible destiny" (25). Guthrie's interpretation of tragedy differs from Steiner's, but both have definite implications in Friel's drama.

Steiner's theory stresses that tragedy as a form of drama is not universal, but only Hellenic. Tragedy is alien to the Judaic view of the world because "Jehovah is just, even in His fury," even to his servant Job, whom he ultimately rewards. Marxism, too, says Steiner, repudiates the entire concept of tragedy: "'Necessity,' Marx

declared, 'is blind only in so far as it is not understood.'" Tragic drama, however, asserts the opposite: "necessity is blind and man's encounter with it shall rob him of his eyes. . . . Men's accounts with the gods do not balance. . . . We are punished far in excess of our guilt" (*Death* 3-9). Steiner's description makes clear the distinction between his and Guthrie's interpretations:

> Tragic drama tells us that the spheres of reason, order, and justice are terribly limited and that no progress in our science or technical resources will enlarge their relevance. Outside and within man is *l'autre,* the "otherness" of the world. Call it what you will: a hidden or malevolent God, blind fate, the solicitations of hell, or the brute fury of our animal blood. It waits for us in ambush at the crossroads. It mocks us and destroys us. In certain rare instances, it leads us after destruction to some incomprehensible repose.
>
> [Tragedy gives us] a terrible, stark insight into human life. Yet in the very excess of his suffering lies man's claim to dignity. . . . Man is ennobled by the vengeful spite or injustice of the gods. . . . Hence there is in the final moments of great tragedy . . . a fusion of grief and joy, of lament over the fall of man and of rejoicing in the resurrection of his spirit. (*Death* 8-10)

The tragedy in Friel's plays, if we may call it tragedy, is of both these varieties. The losses resulting from relationships unfulfilled, love unexpressed, dreams unrealized, illusions destroyed, values negated--these are close to Guthrie's definition of tragedy in which human beings fail to understand their origins or destinies. As Kiley says in his review of Kinsella, these tragedies in which "the worst we do in life" is done in a "kind of damned innocence . . . edge toward Sophoclean despair." They "edge toward,"

but do not quite reach, the height of Greek drama where man is a victim of forces that lie beyond the sphere of reason, like forces in Ireland that operate on the pagan level, in a world where human intelligence has no place. The forces *within* drive men to white hot fury for revenge, blind lust for land, or a passion for Ireland personified as dark Rosaleen. The forces *without* stack the cards against man, allowing him no chance to realize his dreams or human needs. With its insistence on the irrational, the injustice of suffering, the "otherness" of the world, and the ennobling nature of tragedy, Steiner's interpretation seems especially applicable to Ireland. Yet Friel's plays also reflect Guthrie's view of a mystical destiny awaiting us that only seems tragic because we do not comprehend its meaning.

Steiner claims tragic drama ended with Shakespeare and Racine. Its disappearance began in the nineteenth century when theatre-going ceased to be a ritual communal event and became merely a form of entertainment. Perhaps he is right, but Csilla Bertha, in a discussion of Friel's *Translations,* points out that modern critics see "a sense of irreparable loss" as "essential to the tragic experience although it is not tragic in itself." It may be the loss of a past state of happiness and bliss--perhaps that found in childhood; it may arise out of man's sense of alienation, isolation, or futility. In these cases man is a passive sufferer. Bertha perceptively observes that from time to time, particularly in small countries, a kind of tragedy that regains "the communal attraction that Steiner found missing" may emerge. In this kind of tragedy the

irreparable loss involves the loss of communal values--the freedom and independence of a nation or a community or its right to its own culture, traditions, or language. The suffering then occurs on two levels, individual and communal. The individual suffers because he does have faith, does believe in values, and identifies himself with them (209).

When community values are overturned, the individual suffers criticism if he remains true to these values; he escapes censure if he openly denies them, but he then suffers inwardly for his betrayal. He becomes a split personality. Conor Cruise O'Brien argues that irony is a marked characteristic of Irish writing because "the Irish predicament, with its striking contrasts between pretences and realities, has been unusually favourable to the development of this mode of expression" (43).

Friel's dramas are not tragedies, at least not in the sense the ancients knew tragedy. Most of his plays are best classified as tragicomedy--a blend of comedy and tragedy in which the tragic becomes all the more powerful when overlaid with a comic mask, giving it an intensity it could not otherwise obtain in a modern context. Friel's blend of comedy and tragedy differs from Shakespeare's in that while Shakespeare alternates scenes of intense tragedy with those of comic relief, Friel maintains a comic surface which reveals an underlying tragic situation. By arousing the sympathy that comedy elicits, Friel heightens the loss and intensifies the tragic situation.

In his choice of this form, Friel shows not only an acute dramatic sense, but also joins the long heritage of Irish comedy--a heritage that is set forth by David Krause in *The Profane Book of Irish Comedy.* Krause comments on the reasons for and uses of the comic imagination in a country where foreign authority and oppression have long been a reality, and where strong moral constraints upheld by an authoritarian religion have held sway. Krause says:

> The comic impulse shares with the mythic impulse the fictive power of reconstructing and releasing our unconscious aspirations, our private desires that are frustrated in the conscious or public world. . . . It is perhaps the main joke or comic purpose of modern Irish drama, and probably of all compensatory laughter, to undo the burden of Apollonian renunciation and retrieve the mythic sense of a denied or lost Dionysian freedom and joy. (18, 20)

Krause points out how comedy has long been a reaction to "the awareness of one's misery, one's original sin, . . . excessive guilt, and the rigid pieties of the world," which "must be profaned in the name of freedom" (27). "In a righteous country such as Ireland, then, the artist often resorts to the rebellion of profane laughter" (37). Thomas Kilroy describes Friel's humor as "compassionate but with a deadly accuracy of intonation and reference, . . . a cleansing humour, utterly impatient before false feeling, false sympathy and a false use of language" (9). Friel's comic imagination enables his drama to contain sentiment but to avoid mawkishness.

Thus, Friel's plays range from those that are basically tragic, with the tragedy not so much relieved as intensified by comic

humor, to those that are comic with the comedy turned ironic by a sense of tragic doom or disintegration. Northrop Frye speaks of a type of comedy in which a "more intense irony is achieved when the humorous society simply disintegrates without anything taking its place, as . . . frequently in Chekhov" (178). Critics have often compared Friel to Chekhov. His play *Aristocrats* has been called "utterly Chekhovian" and described as a "Chopin-flecked *Cherry Orchard* or *Three Sisters,* in which the ache of one family becomes a microcosm for the ache of a society" (Pine 2, Rich C15). Etherton sees Chekhovian overtones in *The Freedom of the City, Living Quarters,* and *The Faith Healer,* as well (166). In Friel's current play, *Dancing at Lughnasa,* his five Mundy sisters are trapped in 1936 Donegal in the same way the Prozorov sisters are trapped in provincial Russia in Chekhov's *The Three Sisters.* Both plays dramatize a kind of paralysis in a bittersweet comedy that uses music to enhance meaning.[7]

Frye also speaks of comedies that "seem to approach a potentially tragic crisis near the end," a feature he calls "the point of ritual death." Sometimes "the point of ritual death is vestigial, not an element in the plot but a mere change of tone . . . a point near the end at which the tone suddenly becomes serious, sentimental, or ominous of potential catastrophe" (179). With their emphasis on sacrifice, Friel's plays often contain this point of ritual death. Sometimes the sacrificial victim is an outsider (*Translations, The Gentle Island*), sometimes the central character (*Faith Healer*),

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[7]See Robert Tracy, "Eight Sisters in Irish Drama."

sometimes Derry demonstrators or political prisoners (*The Freedom of the City, Volunteers*), sometimes part of an individual personality (*Cass, Philadelphia, Here I Come!*). When the sacrifice is that of a character's illusions or one side of his personality, the ritual death is vestigial. *Dancing at Lughnasa* studies sacrifice in many forms, and although no character dies during the time span of the play, all are "sacrificed" in various ways to various forces. The play ends on the serious, sentimental, ominous note of which Frye speaks.

In discussing the connection between drama and ritual, Friel has said:

> Drama without ritual is poetry without rhythm--hence, not poetry, not drama. That is not to say that ritual is an 'attribute' of drama: it is the essence of drama. Drama is a RITE, and always religious in the purest sense. (Letter from Friel, qtd. in Dantanus 118)

Furthermore, Friel is well aware that, if a dramatist would accomplish anything, he must be able to hold his audience. He has said that the concern of the dramatist

> is to communicate with every individual in that audience, but he can do that only through the collective mind. If he cannot get the attention of that collective mind, hold it, persuade it, mesmerize it, manipulate it, he has lost everything. ("Theatre of Hope" 15)

If he captures this communal mind, the play becomes a ritual in which every member of the audience participates and is changed.

Like Kinsella in his poems, Friel never concludes his plays with an obvious answer. Christopher Murray, discussing the unresolved ending of *Translations,* says: "Friel, the dramatist as poststructuralist, refuses to end any other way. The reticence is all" ("Friel and After" 28). Friel himself has said,

> The days of the solid, well-made play are gone, the play with a beginning, a middle, and an end, where in Act I a dozen carefully balanced characters are thrown into an arena and are presented with a problem, where in Act II they attack the problem and one another according to the Queensbury Rules of Drama, and in Act III the problem is cosily resolved and all concerned are a lot wiser, a little nobler, and preferably a bit sadder. And these plays are finished because we know that life is about as remote from a presentation-problem-resolution cycle as it can be. ("Theatre of Hope" 16)

Speaking in 1967 on the role of the artist, and especially the dramatist, he said "dramatists have no solutions":

> Furthermore, it is not their function to give answers. . . . They are vitally, persistently, and determinedly concerned with one man's insignificant place in the here-and-now world. They have the function to portray that one man's frustrations and hopes and anguishes and joys and miseries and pleasures with all the precision and accuracy and truth that they know; and by so doing help to make a community of individuals. . . . They recognize with great clarity the conflict between the world of the flesh and the world of the spirit, . . . the world of the physical and the world of the cerebral. . . . They are asking us to recognize that even in confusion and disillusion, strength and courage can exist, and that out of them can come a redemption of the human spirit. ("Theatre of Hope" 17)

Friel refuses, in William Faulkner's phrase, "to accept the decline of man." He insists that out of despair can come hope.

CHAPTER III
SACRIFICES: THE PERSONAL CONFLICT

"*Manus:* There's ways and ways of telling every story. Every story has seven faces." --*The Gentle Island (56)*

In Friel's plays sacrifices range from the ritual killing of animals to self-willed destruction. Characters consciously but agonizingly let go of a part of themselves, are unwitting or unwilling victims of prevailing economic or political conditions, or sacrifice someone close to them. The exact reason for a given sacrifice often remains unclear, Friel's intent ambiguous. Such is the case in *The Enemy Within, Crystal and Fox,* and *Faith Healer,* Friel's closely related plays that all focus on sacrifice.

In these plays Friel explores the problem of the artist's role in society. The context is less Irish, less political, historical, and socio-economic, than in his other plays. Nevertheless, the position of the Irish "tinker" figures in *Crystal and Fox,* historical and religious background and the pagan-Christian dichotomy tie *The Enemy Within* to an Irish context, and *Faith Healer* structurally and thematically draws on the Irish legend of Deirdre and Naoise. Friel gives these plays a universal context through the illusion-reality theme, the conflict between "high calling" and ties of home and family, and allusions to the Garden of Eden and the life of Christ. Friel's text in *Faith Healer,* with its use of divided characters and a fragmented narrative suggesting the elusive nature of truth, belongs

in existential, experimental, and post-Modernist literature.

In these three plays Friel looks at the problem of exile and the exile's return. All the protagonists are exiles because of their "calling"--Columba a religious exile, Fox Melarkey the performer or artist as exile, and Frank Hardy, the faith healer, a combination of the two. Hardy and Columba have left Ireland for foreign soil, specifically that of Scotland and the Scottish isle of Iona. Expatriation, with its attendant rootlessness, forces the exile to create his own version of reality because he is separated from the reality he has known. Melarkey, like the tinkers or "travellers" who have roamed the backroads of Ireland for centuries, lives outside the customs and mores of the settled population around him though he depends upon these people for a livelihood. This situation, together with his profession of showmanship, leads to a life based on illusion.

Both *The Enemy Within* and *Crystal and Fox* read like trial runs for *Faith Healer.* Both center on a single, divided male protagonist. Both conclude in sacrifices--not in deaths as in *Faith Healer*--but in irrevocable alienations of human beings who have been close allies, in one case a brother, in the other a wife. These sacrifices involve denial of one side of the main character. Both plays leave the reader to wonder exactly what position Friel takes in the final resolution. Each develops a conflict that *Faith Healer* further explores, but each addresses a different facet of that conflict. Friel re-creates Fox Melarkey in Frank Hardy the entertainer; he resurrects Columba in Hardy as a Christ-figure.

The Enemy Within

The Enemy Within, Friel's first successful play, opened at the Abbey Theatre on August 6, 1962, a year before his internship with Tyrone Guthrie, two years before *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* opened in Dublin. Friel has described it as "a solid play": "It's not good, but it was a commendable sort of a play. There's nothing very wrong with it and there's certainly nothing very good about it" (qtd. in Morison 8). The play is better than his modest assessment of it suggests.

For context, Friel turns to the sixth-century life of Saint Columcille, who, as we have seen, founded a Catholic monastery which became the city of Derry. While little substantiated historical fact exists about the man, religious and secular legends flourished and have survived. In his preface, Friel directs the reader to Saint Adamnan's *Life* for information on the saint as a builder of monasteries, a prophet, and a miracle worker. Friel has concentrated "on the private man" and has written neither history nor biography but "an imaginative account." He points out that Columba lived in "violent and bloody" days and was reared "among a people whose Constitution and National Construction rendered civil faction almost inseparable from their existence" (*EW* 6-7). In Columba, Friel has found a man who suits the purpose of his play.

Columba is a victim of divided loyalty. A priest, a founder of monasteries, and a missionary, revered and admired for his holy work and loved by his "holy" family of monks and novices, he is also a proud tribesman, descendant of kings, kinsman of the Ui Neills of

Tyrone and Tyrconnel, and devoted to Ireland and the family related to him by blood ties. He could have been a tribal chieftain had he not chosen to follow Christ. He goes into exile to pursue his religious calling, but he keeps returning to Ireland in his mind, in reality, and in his nature. His final choice is to renounce Ireland and his earthly family to be true to his calling. For that choice he is cursed and denounced by his brother Eoghan. The break seems final enough, but we are not sure Columba is happy with his choice or strong enough to keep the vow. Nor are we sure we want him to make that choice, or that Friel wants him to. We doubt the wisdom of Columba's choice not because he doubts it, but because Friel makes the appeal of Ireland and the attachment Columba feels to land and family more palpable than his religious calling.

Robert T. Reilly's picture of Columcille reflects the influence of religious and legendary accounts of this man who holds the highest place among native Irish saints. Much of his charm, Reilly says, "lay in his essentially Celtic character--devout, fiery, energetic, romantic and able." He was born at Gartan, County Donegal, "on a grey December day in 521." Derry was the first monastery he founded and "his first and truest love." Reilly quotes verses attributed to Columba that speak to Derry with the same fervent devotion Friel's character expresses toward Ireland. At forty-two, Columba left Ireland, an exile. Legend says he was banished for inflaming the Ui Neills to war against High King Dermott because of personal grievances Columba had against the king. He returned in 574 to speak on behalf of the poets when a new

High King was considering the abolishment of the craft of poetry.

Máire Herbert attempts to separate fact from legend in her study of the history and hagiography of the monastic *Familia* of Columba. She uses Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* (the *Life* to which Friel refers), written at the end of the seventh century, and a vernacular poem, the *Amra* or eulogy, composed around 600. While Herbert's findings discount many of the legends, such as Columba's banishment for instigating war between the Ui Neills and King Dermott, she does support his place as an important religious and secular leader. She believes he arranged and attended the "conference of the kings" between his kinsman Aed mac Ainmerech, ruler of the Ui Neills, and Aedán mac Gabráin, king of the Dál Riata in Scotland, a conference which resulted in peaceful relations up until 637. Columba seems to have been on friendly terms with the ruler of Dumbarton in Britain and to have visited the Pictish king Brude in Scotland. Herbert finds that he returned to Ireland on more than one occasion, and that his career shows "the potential for mutual benefit arising out of co-operation between church and dynasty" (35). While her findings do not stress Columba's involvement in the battles of his Ui Neill kinsmen, she supports Friel's interpretation of him as a man divided between religious calling and secular interests.

Although in this early play Friel uses no special techniques to illustrate his character's divided nature, he makes it clear that Columba is two men in one body. Columba's devotion to his brother monks is strong. This second family is harmonious and supportive,

in marked contrast to his tribal kinsmen who are embroiled in external rivalries and internal bickering. He is dedicated to his role as religious leader, but his true devotion seems to be to "damned beautiful Ireland" as much as to God. He is too earthy a figure to be caught up in mystical ecstasy. He recognizes this tendency within himself and begs Grillaan, his spiritual counselor, to prescribe harsh punishment to "Crush this violent Adam into subjection":

> I am burdened with this strong, active body that responds to the whistle of movement, the fight of the sail, the swing of the axe, the warm breadth of a horse beneath it, the challenge of a new territory. I try! I try! And it betrays me! (*EW* 46)

Columba's struggles hinge on human relationships. His remorse for deserting the monastery for three weeks to engage in Cousin Hugh's tribal squabbles is not real until he discovers that Caornan, his valued scribe and closest friend, has died in his absence. Caornan, a truly dedicated monk, has worn chains until they have eaten into his flesh. The misunderstanding over Caornan's last wish indicates the difference between the two men. Columba assumes the scribe wants release from exile in order to spend his last days in Ireland, his family home, and he has made arrangements for Caornan to do this. With his dying breath, however, Caornan has revealed that he wants to be sent to the lonely Isles of Orkney, where he can do penance for the happy life and friends he has found at Iona. Columba suffers further agony over an angry outburst in which he struck Oswald, the novice who has come to Iona because he idolizes Columba. In characteristic immoderation, neglecting his

duties and the other novices, Columba spends days searching for Oswald, who has disappeared after the blow.

Columba's final denunciation of Ireland and his family shows a further excess of emotion. His brother Eoghan and Eoghan's son Aedh have come to plead with Columba to return once more to Ireland. This appeal is much stronger than the earlier one he has heeded. Aedh's son Donnchadh, Columba's grand-nephew and direct heir to the position of tribal chieftain, is being held by the Picts. The baby's mother, a converted Pict, has taken the baby home because of a domestic quarrel involving her father-in-law Eoghan and a woman with whom he has been living. Now her family will not let mother and baby return. Eoghan's appeal is based on blood ties and ties to the land:

> My blood and yours and the blood of Fedhlimidh, our father, flows in the veins of that child, Columb. What would he say if he were standing here now--leave it to the Picts? Let it grow up a heathen, a stranger to the soft lands of Gartan? (*EW* 65)

All the warring factions of the family are uniting to attack the Picts and bring the child home. Eoghan argues that if Columba will lead them, bloodshed can be avoided. Columba weakens and is preparing to go until Aedh says, "And Antrim is rich! The booty there'll be!" (*EW* 68). Columba realizes he will be involving himself in another episode of tribal violence, and in a "pathetic appeal" he begs them to release him:

> Look at me, brother, look at me. I am an old man. My arms are scarred by the wounds of battle. Look at them. And here--here is a heart that leaps when you call, and pounds against my ribs

> to join you and lead you and fight with you. But I have a soul, too, that whispers to me. I am small and puny, it says, because you have neglected me. And in a short time I will be standing before the King, it says, and I am pale and untried, it says. I am not reddened by blood, it says. Give me at least your failing years, it says, to battle with the flesh-- (*EW* 68)

His appeal gains only a violent flood of damning curses from Eoghan. After Eoghan has left, Columba cries out against him, but his cry is really against Ireland:

> Get out of my monastery! Get out of my island! Get out of my life! Go back to those damned mountains and seductive hills that have robbed me of my Christ! You soaked my sweat! You sucked my blood! You stole my manhood, my best years! What more do you demand of me, damned Ireland? My soul? My immortal soul? Damned, damned, damned Ireland! (*EW* 70)

Then his voice breaks and he expresses his love for Ireland as if speaking to a woman: "Soft, green Ireland--beautiful, green Ireland--my lovely green Ireland. O my Ireland--" (*EW* 70). The image of Ireland as a woman thus makes a subtle unannounced entrance into this first play of Friel's.

Grillaan understands Columba's problem and prescribes a regimen of moderation for him, permitting no excesses of penitence. Oswald is found and together, Columba declares, they will begin again. Friel leaves us to wonder if Columba will overcome his love for the things of this world and become as devoted as Caornan, or if --the more likely prospect--as Grillaan had indicated, his lot will be to begin again, and fall again, and begin again. Columba was made a saint, but as we shall see with Frank Hardy, the greatness of his victory lies in the difficulty of the struggle and the strength of the

adversary. The lure of Ireland is a powerful adversary.

The play establishes Friel's theme of the Christian-pagan dichotomy, that fundamental division of the Irish mind. We have seen how this duality first appeared in literature in the *Dialogue between Patrick and Oisín.* The pagan represents ancient Ireland, the attachment to the land itself, the tribal ties, the emotional response to earthly things, the animal instincts, the lack of restraints. The Christian represents restraint, moderation, denial of earthly pleasures, breaking of bonds with the earth, cutting of human and tribal ties. *The Enemy Within* affords the first example of the uneasy tension Friel maintains between these elements in his plays.

Crystal and Fox

Between *The Enemy Within* and *Faith Healer,* Friel wrote *Crystal and Fox.* The travelling entertainer Fox Melarkey and his wife Crystal live like gypsies, exiles not from Ireland, but from the society they depend on for their existence. They get little respect from this society. When Fox has dealings with the law, especially the English law in the form of two detectives who come to arrest his son, he and Crystal are called "stinking gypsies" and other insulting epithets, and she is thrown to the ground. Fox must fawn and grovel before the officers, compromising his integrity. He also must pander to the country people who attend the shows.

Crystal and Fox moves from the sordid reality of the Melarkeys' lives into the realm of allegory. The transition is barely

noticeable at first because of the unreal nature of their "real" lives. They live by illusion. Everything they do is tinged with falsity and pretense. Crystal and Fox, though truly devoted to each other, keep up a theatrical patois, addressing each other always as "My love" and "My sweet." The play they present for the entertainment of "decent country people and their little kiddies" is a pastiche of banality, poor taste, sentimentality, poor acting, and insincerity. The audience comes not so much for the entertainment as for a chance to win a five-pound note in the raffle held after the show. The raffle, too, is "fixed." Crystal's father, posing as "Sean O'Sullivan from outside Dublin," wins the raffle.

The show includes "that dashing Spaniard and his team of superhuman dogs--the ex-star of the Moscow Circus--Pedro!" Pedro is really Paddy Donnellan, who has one dog "Gringo," a female, to whom he is devoted. Two other performers, El Cid, a magician, and his assistant Tanya, leave the show during the first act of the play because Fox drives them away by blatantly refusing to honor the Cid's request for last place in the curtain calls. Before departing, the Cid denounces Fox as "twisted as a bloody corkscrew" and says, "No wonder his own son cleared off to England" (*CF* 14). The exact reason for Fox's break with his son is never clear, but we do learn that Fox has driven away other performers. Finally he gets rid of poor Pedro by poisoning Gringo.

Fox's conflict is between the life of illusion and pretense he follows and a life of reality and honesty he believes he has glimpsed once or twice on rare occasions "when the fog lifted." He chooses to

renounce the life of illusion by systematically ridding himself of the members of his travelling cast by successively more cruel methods until only he and Crystal are left. He then discovers that the life of integrity he is seeking, which he describes as "a dream he thought he had once," does not exist.

In the final scene Friel enacts an allegory of the Garden of Eden. The characters' names function much as names in sixteenth-century allegories. George O'Brien believes that Crystal represents "transparency and purity" while Fox suggests "cunning and something untamed" (65). But the allegory goes deeper than this. Crystal is Fox's Eve, representing innocence and goodness, while he is a modern Adam, seeking his identity as he struggles to wrest a dream of perfection out of a life of compromises. After Fox has cut all ties in order to return to a state of what he believes to be innocence--an idyllic existence he imagines he and Crystal had in the first days of their marriage--he is rudely awakened to the fact that Crystal is not the epitome of goodness and innocence he has imagined. Her reference to an early relationship with the rival showman Dick Prospect (Satan, with another allegorical name), and her confession that she knew of Fox's cruel acts and did not really care, destroy all of Fox's dreams of Eden. She reveals her own selfishness and "rottenness" by saying, "I really didn't give a damn about any of them, God forgive me, not even Pedro, not as long as you didn't turn on me. . . . To hell with everything else." Friel's stage directions at this point are: "*This revelation stuns Fox. He stares at her in utter amazement and incredulity*" (*CF* 57). Maddened by

his Eve's betrayal, and driven to a final act of cruelty, Fox lies to Crystal, telling her he has informed on their only son and caused him to be arrested for murder. When Crystal leaves him, Fox is left with the rickety wheel of chance, his accordion, and the Primus stove. He has sacrificed everything for a dream and is left, a broken man, with his empty reality of luck, pretense, and necessity.

Friel's move from realism into allegory in *Crystal and Fox* is a necessary step on the road from *The Enemy Within* to *Faith Healer.* We have seen two characters--one divided between his religious calling and his love for home and family, the other between reality and illusion--both sacrifice someone for whom they care a great deal and lose a part of themselves in the bargain. Both plays could be read as parables; they seem to contain a lesson but their meaning is a riddle. Both protagonists suggest parallels with the artist/playwright. Friel's comment on sainthood is interesting in this context. In an early interview he said that in *The Enemy Within* he was trying to discover how Columba acquired sanctity, defining sanctity "in the sense of a man having tremendous integrity and the courage to back it up." He described James Joyce as "a saint" who acquired integrity by "turning his back on Ireland and on his family."[8] Both Columba and Fox turn their backs. One becomes a saint; the other destroys himself. In *Faith Healer* Frank Hardy does both.

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[8]Reported in Dantanus 14. The interview was printed in *The Guardian,* 8 Oct. 1964: 9.

Faith Healer

Frank Hardy represents the artist/playwright, a Christ figure, an exile, and a modern Naoise, the lover of Deirdre in the Celtic legend. Although the play offers these many opportunities for interpreting Hardy, his final self-sacrifice raises questions that Friel does not resolve. Paul Robinson believes the play contains "symbolic and allegorical implications . . . which point to Ireland in search of its final identity" (223). Though this final identity has yet to be discovered, Friel provides valuable insights into the problems of the exile, the artist, and the exiled artist. The artist, particularly the writer or the playwright--and naturally Friel sees from this perspective--is always to some extent an exile, even if he remains in his own country.

That each person creates a fictional version of the past in order to face the unpleasant realities of the present is the basic premise of *Faith Healer* and a recurrent theme in Friel's plays. One person's recollection of events may differ radically from that of another. *Faith Healer* consists entirely of four monologues in which each character gives an account of the life the three shared while they travelled the back roads of Scotland and Wales in a ramshackle van, living like gypsies. No two characters ever appear on stage at the same time; thus they have no fear that their stories will be questioned. While they agree on certain details to the point of repeating them verbatim, they disagree radically on other equally important points.

This experimental technique has prompted critics to call the play a "dramatised novel" (Kiberd "Friel's *Faith Healer*" 106). The use of four contradictory monologues reminds Declan Kiberd of Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury:* "The method is identical, even down to the detail of having one of the monologues narrated by a witness of unstable mind, in Faulkner the lunatic Benjy, in Friel the shattered and suicidal Grace Hardy" (106). A further similarity exists in the fact that neither author encourages us to discount the testimony of these witnesses of unstable minds. T. E. Kalem and Paul Robinson have both commented on the similarity of *Faith Healer* to *Rashomon,* the Japanese story and movie composed of a series of monologues giving different accounts of the murder of a lord and the rape of his wife. Iris Murdoch employs a similar technique in her psychological mystery, *The Black Prince.* These writers either leave the reader with the unresolved question of which version to believe, or reveal the truth through a combination of the narratives. Parallels between *Faith Healer* and the life of Christ suggest that Friel may have had in mind the four gospels, accounts that differ in details but reveal a central "truth."

The unusual dramatic structure of *Faith Healer* cost Friel something in popular reception. It ran only twenty days in New York with James Mason, Clarissa Kaye, and Donal Donnelly, and directed by José Quintero. In his playlet *American Welcome,* performed by the Actors Theater in Louisville, Kentucky, Friel comments with wry humor on *Faith Healer's* reception in New York. The sketch presents a European playwright being told by an American director that the

monologue form of his play has been recast as a "four-character, two-act, single-set comedy" because Americans "talk, . . . communicate, . . . exchange" (113-14). *Faith Healer* was much more successful in Ireland where it won for Donal McCann the Harvey Award for Best Actor of 1980-81. Kiberd says *Faith Healer* "may well be the finest play to come out of Ireland since J. M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*" ("Friel's *Faith Healer*" 106). Friel has always been willing to sacrifice commercial success to artistic integrity. With *Faith Healer* one gets the impression that this play embodies a subject he had to explore further.

Divided Characters and a Fragmented Narrative

The fragmented narrative forms only one of the divisions in the play. In what he calls Friel's "most sophisticated use of the familiar divided character," George O'Brien notes that Frank and his wife/mistress Grace are "divided against each other and, as an apparently necessary consequence, each [is] divided in him- or herself" (101). Frank's Cockney manager, Teddy, reflects on the relationship between Grace and Frank:

> And what was the fighting all about in the end? All right, you could say it was because the only thing that finally mattered to him was his work--and that would be true. Or you could say it was because the only thing that finally mattered to her was him--and I suppose that would be true too. But when you put the two propositions together like that--I don't know--somehow they both become only half-truths, you know. (*FH* 360)

O'Brien believes that "the complementary half of the truth the play

as a whole contains is Teddy himself" (101). He sees Teddy as a realist, a survivor, stoical and detached. His is the unexamined life; he is unselfconscious, unaware that he has a fate. Yet Frank and Grace, with their sensitivity, their constant awareness of fate, their "passionate involvement and extravagant emotion," are not to be preferred to Teddy. Together, O'Brien says, the characters give the play "a completeness of which each of its characters' lives is deprived" (102).

Yet Teddy, too, is torn between secret love for Grace and unwavering devotion to Frank. While he professes to handle his artists on a "strictly business only" basis, the intensely personal nature of his relationship with Frank and Grace surfaces early in his monologue. Friel's intricate triple-narrative technique allows each character to reveal his personality through his interpretation of the events and the motives of the other characters. The complex structure, however, leaves the audience with a multiple-choice interpretation of the play's meaning.

All the monologues report or allude to three significant events which form the three "acts" of the drama. In the first event, Frank has healed ten people in the Welsh village of Llanblethian. Grace, however, says only that an "old farmer outside Cardiff gave him [Frank] £200 for curing his limp . . . and we booked into the Royal Abercorn and for four nights we lived like kings" (*FH* 343). Teddy reports that "every single person in that church was cured. Ten people." Frank "had given them some great content in themselves as well." The farmer who was cured had said, "Mr Hardy, as long as

men live in Glamorganshire, you'll be remembered here." Teddy adds, "and whatever way he said Glamorganshire, it sounded like the whole world." Grace and Frank "sang and danced in the snow . . . like kids" and then drove off in the van leaving Teddy behind for four days (*FH* 359). Frank's account of the incident consists of reading a newspaper clipping from the *West Glamorgan Chronicle* reporting that "something of highly unusual proportions took place that night in Llanblethian." He has carried the clipping with him because, he says, "It identified me--even though it got my name wrong"--Harding for Hardy (*FH* 371). Thus, Grace ignores the significance of Frank's greatest professional success. She remembers only the personal pleasure she derived from it. Teddy in his admiration for Frank perhaps exaggerates the importance of the event and overlooks Grace and Frank's inconsiderate treatment of him. Impressed with his success but genuinely puzzled about its meaning, Frank searches in the incident for a clue to his identity.

The second significant event is the birth of a stillborn child to Grace and Frank. The birth takes place in the back of the van "in Kinlochbervie, in Sutherland, about as far north as you can go in Scotland. A picturesque little place, very quiet, very beautiful, looking across to the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides" (*FH* 337). Although all three repeat these details ritually, Grace says it rained the entire time they were there, while Teddy says the village was bathed in sunlight. Never mentioning the birth, Frank says they were there for "a few days rest" when, receiving word that his mother had suffered a heart attack, he returned home to Limerick to find she

had died. Teddy reports that they were stranded in Kinlochbervie because the front axle of the van broke. When Grace went into labor, he says, Frank walked away deliberately, leaving Teddy to deliver the tiny, black, macerated baby boy. Teddy and Grace buried the infant in a nearby cow pasture. After Teddy had said a prayer and put up a cross, Frank returned, full of optimistic talk. Although, according to Teddy, he was obviously aware of what had happened, he did not mention the child. Frank's version claims Grace was barren and that he regrets never having had a child. Grace does not report that Frank was absent at the birth. In her account it was he who said the prayers and put up a cross, painted white, containing the words "Infant Child of Francis and Grace Hardy."

The third event, Frank's death, takes place after the three have returned to Ireland. All report the journey in the same words:

> So on the last day of August we crossed from Stranraer to Larne and drove through the night to County Donegal. And there we got lodgings in a pub, a lounge bar, really, outside a village called Ballybeg, not far from Donegal Town. (*FH* 338, 351, 367)

The first three monologues allude to Frank's murder. His final monologue takes him to the moment of his death. Only by piecing together details, however, do we come to know what happened and to realize that both Frank and Grace are relating the story of their lives up to the final hour. They are not spirits nor do they speak from the grave, but by the end of the play we know they are both dead. Only Teddy is alive at the time of his monologue.

Characters forget or suppress facts or events that are unpleasant for them; then significant details come flashing into their minds when they are offguard. Friel may bring a character to the verge of mentioning some painful memory, then let him or her shift to another subject. For example, in Frank's second monologue he repeats the name of Kinlochbervie several times, but never refers to the stillborn child. In his first monologue he has associated the place with his mother's death. Grace reports, however, that he got news of his *father's* death when they were in Wales, not Scotland. His mother had been dead for years when Grace met him. According to Grace, "if he loved anyone he loved his father" (*FH* 345). Frank seems to substitute his mother's death for the deaths of the child and of his father, both of which he is unable to accept.

Both Teddy and Grace attest to the fact that Grace and Frank are married. Frank says Grace was his mistress, that she never asked for nor wanted marriage: "her loyalty was adequate for her" (*FH* 335). Grace says Frank insisted on introducing her as his mistress not only to hurt and humiliate her, but also because of "some compulsion he had to adjust, to refashion, to re-create everything around him" (*FH* 345). Frank declares Grace is from England, Yorkshire--Scarborough or Knaresborough, he cannot remember which. When Grace leaves him at one point to go home to her father, she says, "I got the night crossing from Glasgow and then the bus to Omagh and walked the three miles out to Knockmoyle" (*FH* 347). Omagh, Friel's birthplace, and Knockmoyle are places in Ireland. After the final homecoming, Teddy describes Frank and

Grace as being "at home in Ireland" (*FH* 367). Frank never mentions that Grace left him, but claims instead she said, "If you leave me, Frank, I'll kill myself" (*FH* 374). When he leaves her by dying, she does just that. Frank cannot remember her family name, though he remembers well enough that her father was a judge who accused him of "implicating my only child in your career of chicanery" (*FH* 371). He remembers, too, that her mother was mentally disturbed, and he claims to see a similar weakness in Grace.

One other point of disagreement among the narratives deserves mention: the choice of the song that plays on a scratched record at each of Frank's "performances," or healings. Teddy plays a Kern-Fields song, "The Way You Look Tonight." The irony of this choice is heavy. Friel specifies that the verses used be these:

> Some day when I'm awf'ly low
> When the world is cold,
> I will feel a glow just thinking of you
> And the way you look tonight . . .
>
> Lovely, never, never change,
> Keep that breathless charm,
> Won't you please arrange it
> 'Cause I love you
> Just the way you look tonight. (*FH* 354)

The crippled and diseased people who come to be healed are anything but "lovely," and the words "never, never change" seem to belie the aim of the healer and those who seek to be healed. Yet, as Frank says, the petitioners come not to be healed but for assurance that they are incurable and will "never, never change."

Frank claims Teddy chose the song, while Grace says Frank insisted on it: "'I like it,' he'd say 'and it confuses them'" (*FH* 350). Teddy says Grace picked it because it was the big hit the year she and Frank married. Then she forgot she had picked it, and they both blamed Teddy. By that time, Teddy says, he liked the song, and he whistles and sings it throughout his monologue. No doubt he associates it with his memory of Grace, whom he describes as looking "fantastic" on the last night of Frank's life.

These disagreements illustrate the fragmented nature of truth. The complete truth about the three lives in *Faith Healer* is a shadowy ideal, existing in another world, distant and remote from what is said in the play. Each person's "truth" is controlled by his needs, his weaknesses, and his desires. Putting together the fragments provides not the "true story," but a different truth--the truth about the personalities and their relationships. Even that truth is incomplete. We never fully understand any character's motives. We are denied understanding of the reason for Frank's death. Traditional fiction provides a plausible, causally-related narrative, imposing order on the chaos of life. Through his post-structuralist dramatic technique of fragmentation, Friel provides instead an experience that duplicates the confusion, incomplete knowledge, and lack of understanding that exists in real life.

The Metaphor of the Artist

In addition to fragmenting characters and narrative, Friel splits the metaphorical level of the play. George O'Brien says, "The

metaphor of Frank as artist does not account for his destructiveness." He therefore believes Frank is a "failed artist." His treatment of Grace, says O'Brien, is "clearly the opposite of the redemptive, enhancing influence symbolized by his gift." Grace represents "the fragility and accidental nature of the merely human" and of "the saving grace . . . by which faith can be upheld." Frank and Grace die as a result of "a hapless marriage between art and nature" (99, 101). O'Brien's interpretation is correct up to a point, but he overlooks the larger implications in the portrayal of the faith healer as an artist and also as a Christ-figure.

O'Brien seems unaware of the destructive side of art and the artist. Kiberd recognizes one aspect of this destructive element when he says an artist must at times distort and misunderstand a received text, "for if he ever fully understands his model, then he will be overwhelmed by it and become a derivative writer." Kiberd draws a parallel between James Joyce's treatment of Homer's *Odyssey* and Friel's use of the Deirdre myth in that both authors took liberties with the original text. He argues that by being ignorant of or ignoring the received text, the artist/writer achieves the kind of unawareness Leopold Bloom and Frank Hardy have when they reenact old myths without knowledge of the significance of their actions. Joyce's and Friel's point, Kiberd says, is that "heroism is more often unselfconscious of itself than not" ("Friel's *Faith Healer*" 118-20).

Intellectual awareness is the enemy of creative art. The artist or writer must create out of faith in himself and his gift, not

from formulas, rules, or analytical powers. He uses intuition not reason, the right brain not the left. Teddy is the play's spokesman for this fact, illustrating it with a story of two performing dogs he managed:

> One was a white poodle and she was brilliant. . . . She'd switch on the electric fire, pull the curtains, and leave my slippers and a bottle of beer sitting there beside my chair. But put her in front of an audience--fell apart--couldn't do nothing. Right. Now the other dog was a whippet. . . . Rob Roy, The Piping Dog. . . . [Could] play "Come Into The Garden, Maud" on the bagpipes *and* follow for his encore with "Plaisir d'Amour." . . . Sensational talent. . . . And brains? . . . I had that dog four and a half years, until he expired from pulmonary exhaustion. And in all that time that whippet couldn't even learn his name! (*FH* 355-56)

According to Teddy, the reason Frank will never be more than a mediocre artist is that "his bloody brains has him bloody castrated" (*FH* 357).

The destructive nature of art involves more than a misreading or distortion and more than an absence of intellectual awareness. It requires conscious destruction of work that is derivative, rejection of anything that is not the artist's own, even destruction of much that is the artist's own, but is not good enough. Art must destroy to create. The artist must also be destructive in another way. He must deny many things and people to practice his art, and he must deny himself for the sake of his talent. Yeats describes the artist's dilemma in "The Choice":

> The intellect of man is forced to choose
> Perfection of the life, or of the work,

> And if it take the second must refuse
> A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.
>
> When all that story's finished, what's the news?
> In luck or out the toil has left its mark:
> That old perplexity an empty purse,
> Or the day's vanity, the night's remorse. (*Poems* 246-47)

Yeats's artist rejects the good life, the easy faith, the assurance of a "heavenly mansion," and remains "raging in the dark." For his choice he gets only financial worries, short-lived pride, and lasting remorse.

Friel's faith healer has made his choice. Or perhaps, more accurately, the choice has been made for him. He has a gift. He does not understand the gift and he never knows when it will work, although he knows when it is certain not to work. He cannot deny or ignore the gift; he cannot let it alone. He must use it. It controls him. It renders him a creature driven by uncertainty. If he could accept the gift on faith, he could be rid of the questions, but his intellect forces him to question constantly the nature of his gift.

The "faith" in "faith healer" is the healer's faith in himself. At times he is able to transfer that faith to those he "heals" and give them faith in themselves. It is not a mysterious force flowing through him from some powerful and hidden source. Yet is it perhaps that too? This maddening question torments Frank Hardy:

> *Am I endowed with a unique and awesome gift?*--my God, yes, I'm afraid so. And I suppose the other extreme was *Am I a con man?*--which of course was nonsense, I think. And between those absurd exaggerations the possibilities were legion. Was it all chance?--or skill?--or illusion?--or delusion?

> Precisely what power did I possess? Could I summon it? When and how? Was I its servant? Did it reside in my ability to invest someone with faith in me or did I evoke from him a healing faith in himself? Could my healing be effected without faith? But faith in what?--in me?--in the possibility?--faith in faith? And is the power diminishing? You're beginning to masquerade, aren't you? You're becoming a husk, aren't you? . . . But they persisted right to the end, those nagging, tormenting, maddening questions that rotted my life. (*FH* 333-34)

The parallels between the playwright and the faith healer become increasingly obvious as the play unfolds.

Both Friel and Seamus Heaney draw similar parallels between the writer and the diviner. In one of Friel's early stories called "The Diviner," a small community attempts to recover the body of a man who has drowned. After all other efforts have failed, a diviner is called in. The diviner succeeds, but his service reveals that the man had been drinking heavily when he drowned. Thus, the diviner reveals to the community the man's true character, something his wife has been trying to hide beneath the cloak of respectability. The story focuses on the wife, Nelly Devenny, who has suffered for twenty-five years the shame of a first husband who drank. In her three months' marriage to Arthur Doherty, the drowned man, she has almost established "a foothold on respectability." On Doherty's body are discovered "two dark-green pint whiskey bottles. . . . One had no cork, the other had been opened but the cork was still in it." When his weakness is revealed, it is not the attendant priest, but the postman, a former drinking crony of Nelly's first husband, who initiates the rosary "for the repose of the soul of Arthur Doherty."

As the community joins in, Nelly, who wails above the prayers, crying out in her grief and shame, becomes the voice of the community, crying out in its imperfection, no longer heeding the "respectability" the priest exhorts. The diviner, who "reeks of whiskey" according to the priest, sits on the sideline, his role fulfilled, "waiting for someone to remember to drive him back to County Mayo" ("Diviner" 481). One of Friel's collections of short stories is titled *The Diviner,* showing the importance he attaches to this metaphorical image.

Like the faith healer and the diviner, the writer has a gift the community needs. The gift reveals things to the community it may not want to see, but the revelation is for its ultimate good. People come to Frank Hardy not to be healed but for the certainty that they are incurable--to be rid of doubt. When he heals them, he says, the result is "panic--panic--panic! Their ripping apart! . . . The sudden flooding of dreadful, hopeless hope!" (*FH* 337). But Teddy says they also experience "some great content in themselves as well" (*FH* 359). Teddy is not deluded about this feeling of contentment, because Frank has bestowed on him the same "content" (*FH* 368). Whether in physical, spiritual, or emotional healing, the "redemptive enhancing influence" has its painful, destructive side.

The Metaphor of the Christ-figure

The obvious resemblance of the faith healer, the diviner, and the artist/writer to the shaman or priest brings us to a consideration of Frank Hardy as a Christ-figure. Christ, too,

although his role was redemptive and healing, had his destructive side. This image runs throughout the gospels in direct contradiction to the image of Christ as "gentle Jesus, meek and mild." Even as the "prince of peace," he demonstrates that denial and sacrifice are necessary to the attainment of peace.

Paul Robinson points out that to understand the parallel between Friel's faith healer and Christ, one must be aware of the position taken by modern Christologists who see Jesus not as a person in full knowledge of his divine and Messianic role but as a human being "not understandable even to himself except as a kerygmatic person." Recent scholars contend "that every man seeks to find a meaning of his existence in the world and that this implies a religious dimension to all historical existence."[9] Robinson correctly observes of Frank: "All of his acts which he describes in his monologues turn on the question of his own role and self-identity" (226).

Friel clearly portrays Frank as a Christ-figure in the final events of his life. He goes home to Ireland, sensing that he will die, just as Christ enters Jerusalem with an awareness of the end. The final evening in the pub suggests the Last Supper; the "wedding guests" suggest Christ's symbolic role as bridegroom to the symbolic "bride," the church. Grace says that in Frank's mind "Teddy wasn't just a fit-up man who was always in trouble with the police for pilfering but a devoted servant, a dedicated acolyte to the

[9]John B. Magee, *Religion and Modern Man* (New York, 1967) 111, qtd. in Robinson 226.

holy man" (*FH* 345). Frank says of Teddy, "I never understood why he stayed with me because we barely scraped a living. But he had a devotion to me and I think he had a vague sense of being associated with something . . . spiritual" (*FH* 334). When Frank faces his final hour, Teddy, like Christ's disciples, is asleep. Grace, for all her carping at Frank, declares she cannot go on without him to sustain her. At the close of her monologue she says, "How I want that man to come across that floor and put his white hands on my face and still this tumult inside me . . . O my God I don't know if I can go on without his sustenance" (*FH* 353). Her words suggest traditional attitudes toward and images of Christ.

Grace has earlier described Frank as "in such complete mastery" before a performance "that anything is possible":

> And when you speak to him he turns his head and looks beyond you with those damn benign eyes of his, looking past you out of his completion, out of that private power, out of that certainty that was accessible only to him. (*FH* 343)

This description might apply to Christ under the spell of his Messianic calling or the artist in the throes of creation, but it might just as well be an outsider's interpretation of the inner turmoil of Christ, or the artist, who is seeking the truth of his identity. Grace describes Frank reciting the names of "dying" Welsh and Scottish villages to which they have travelled. The play has opened with Frank delivering this incantatory list:

> Aberarder, Aberayron,
> Llangranog, Llangurig,
> Abergorlech, Abergynolwyn,

> Llandefeilog, Llanerchymedd,
> Aberhosan, Aberporth . . .
>
> Kinlochbervie, Inverbervie,
> Inverdruie, Invergordon,
> Badachroo, Kinlochewe,
> Ballantrae, Inverkeithing,
> Cawdor, Kirkconnel,
> Plaidy, Kirkinner. (*FH* 331-32)

To Grace, Frank is "releasing [the names of the villages] from his mouth in that special voice he used only then, as if he were blessing them or consecrating himself," and during such times she "didn't exist for him. He obliterated me" (*FH* 343-44). Frank has admitted in his first monologue, however, that he became tense before a performance and, as they drove along over narrow winding roads, he would recite the names to himself "just for the mesmerism, the sedation, of the incantation" (*FH* 332). As Robinson observes, "Grace sees Frank as a bastion of certitude. . . . But Frank sees himself as the harbinger of doubt and uncertainty, only achieving the state Grace applies to him at the end of the play--at his 'renouncing chance'" (*FH* 225).

Frank Hardy's Failure

The ritual reciting of place-names opens three of *Faith Healer*'s monologues--those of Frank and Grace --and interrupts them at emotionally significant points. We have seen in Eudora Welty's comments how place-names can become a special language. Both Grace and Frank hesitate in their ritual incantation when they come to the name of Kinlochbervie, indicating that events at this

place marked the turning point in their lives. The incident at Kinlochbervie forms the climax in the three-act structure of the play. At Kinlochbervie Frank's powers fail. He can heal others, but he has no power over the life of his own child. Teddy criticizes Frank for walking away from the birth, saying "Christ, you've got to admit he really was a bastard in many ways." But Teddy then admits that "being the kind of man he was," Frank had suffered all Grace had suffered and "with that strange gift he had, maybe he had to have his own way of facing things" (*FH* 365).

In a significant comment on a writer who seemed to separate his work from his life, Friel has said:

> We cannot split ourselves in this way. We must synthesise in ourselves all those uneasy elements--father, lover, bread-winner, public man, private man--so that they constitute the determining artist. But if we attempt to give one element its head, what we do is bleed the artist in us of a necessary constituent, pander to an erratic appetite within us. ("Extracts from Diary, 1976-78" 39)

Frank Hardy's final downfall results from his failure to synthesize the various elements in his life. He "panders to an erratic appetite" within himself for success in his art--his healing. Failure in Frank's private life blocks the development of this gift. His powers begin to wane. Finally, he decides to return to Ireland. He blames the decision on Teddy, but he admits he was as "heartsick of Wales and Scotland as they were" (*FH* 338). Grace says, "I didn't want to come back to Ireland, but he [Frank] insisted." She believes he "had some sense that Ireland might somehow recharge him, maybe even

restore him" (*FH* 351). The return to Ireland is the ironic, crucial mistake of the hero in this tragedy. This step gives the play its identity with the legend of Deirdre and Naoise. Like Frank and Grace, Naoise and Deirdre, who are the Tristan and Yseut of Irish legend, are not sure why they return to Ireland. This ancient archetypal myth provides one key to the fragmentation and sacrifice of Frank Hardy.

Friel's Deirdre and Naoise

Deirdre has been the subject of works by many writers, including James Stephens, George Russell, W. B. Yeats, and J. M. Synge. Each teller of this tale varies details and alters interpretations. Friel changes the names, but keeps the original outline of the legend. Kiberd discusses the similarities between Friel's and Synge's versions. He summarizes:

> A well-brought-up girl, destined for a noble calling in the north of Ireland, [is] spirited away to Scotland by an attractive but feckless man, to the great dismay of an elderly guardian. . . . In Scotland, the lovers live well enough for many years, supported by their manager Teddy, who discharges the same role . . . as that played by Naisi's [Synge's spelling] brothers, Ainnle and Ardan. . . . Ultimately, however, their nomadic and rootless life is felt to be increasingly hollow and stressful. With some foreboding, they decide to return to Ireland, but in their nervousness and apprehensiveness, each lover attributes the decision to the other. Their worst fears are realised on arrival in Ireland. ("Friel's *Faith Healer*" 107)

Kiberd ignores Yeats's *Deirdre,* which has as much relevance in interpreting Friel as does Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows.*

Synge's Deirdre is the woman of the ancient legend, fated to bring destruction on the world through her unsurpassed beauty. She is "the child who had all gifts, and the beauty that has no equal" (Synge 229). The prophecy foretells that she will cause the ruin of Fergus and the sons of Uisneach. Yeats likens her to Helen of Troy and links the two with his "Rose of the World," a symbol of ideal beauty, the ideal woman, and the image of Ireland as a woman:

> Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?
> For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,
> Mournful that no new wonder may betide,
> Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,
> And Usna's children died. (*Poems* 36)

Deirdre joins the long line of devouring females in myth and literature. She is the Irish muse, the Leanhaun Shee, who lures Naoise away from duty, from loyalty to King Conchobor, from his homeland, and ultimately to his death. The Leanhaun Shee is a succuba, a *"belle dame sans merci,"* a fairy mistress who, according to Yeats, "seeks the love of men. If they refuse, she is their slave; if they consent, they are hers. . . . Her lovers waste away, for she lives on their life." Yeats saw the Leanhaun Shee as a Gaelic Muse who inspired Gaelic poets. As a result, these poets died young, for she "carried them away to other worlds."[10] Naoise is at first reluctant to elope to Scotland with Deirdre, but when she confronts him with the fact that Conchobor will come the next day to take her to be his queen, Naoise resolves to go, even if it means

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[10]See "Irish Fairies, Ghosts, Witches, etc." rpt. in *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats,* ed. John P. Frayne (London: Macmillan; New York: Columbia UP, 1970) vol. 1, qtd. in Keane x.

his death. In Synge's poetic phrases, Deirdre and Naoise discuss the risk and the rewards:

> DEIRDRE: It's a sweet life you and I could have, Naisi. . . . I'm in little dread of death, and it earned with riches would make the sun red with envy, and he going up the heavens; and the moon pale and lonesome, and she wasting away. . . .
>
> NAISI: Then we'll go away. It isn't I will give your life to Conchubor, not if the grave was dug to be my lodging when a week was by. (230-31)

After seven idyllic years in Alban, Deirdre, Naoise, Ainnle, and Ardan return to Ireland. Various forces combine to bring about their return. Owen, a character Synge added, tries to persuade Deirdre to be unfaithful to Naoise. When she refuses, in his rage he warns her, "Queens get old, Deirdre, with their white and long arms going from them, and their backs hooping" (238). When she gets old and ugly, Owen says, Naoise will no longer love her. Fergus has come from Conchobor, promising amnesty. Although Fergus trusts Conchobor, Owen warns of a plot. Deirdre makes the final decision after she overhears Naoise confess to Fergus, "I've a dread upon me a day'd come I'd weary of her voice, and Deirdre'd see I'd wearied" (241). Upon their arrival in Ireland, the three brothers are killed by Conchobor's men. Deirdre stabs herself and falls into the grave with them.

Synge's theme is the brevity of youth and love. It is better, he says, to die young when beauty and passion are at their height than live to experience old age and watch beauty fade and love grow cold. When Naoise gives in to Deirdre's argument to return, he says,

"You're right, maybe. It should be a poor thing to see great lovers and they sleepy and old" (244). The theme is not surprising for a man aware of the imminence of his own death. This play was his last. The lyrics of Jerome Kern's song, "Lovely, never, never change, / Keep that breathless charm" could serve as an ironic comment on Synge's play as well as they do on Friel's.

Yeats begins his play at the start of Synge's third act, after Deirdre and Naoise have returned to Ireland. He leaves out altogether the characters of Ainnle and Ardan, but adds three musicians who function as chorus to establish the legendary and heroic nature of the characters. Fergus is again responsible for the lovers' return because he foolishly believes he has convinced Conchobor to forgive them. He takes Naoise and Deirdre to a humble guesthouse instead of to a regal welcome at Emain Macha, the king's castle, but he assures them all is well. Although they are not warned by the discovery of a newly dug grave, as Synge's lovers are, a series of ominous events builds tension. Most ominous and significant are a chessboard and chessmen lying on a small table. Naoise immediately recognizes them:

> It is the board
> Where Lugaidh Redstripe and that wife of his,
> Who had a seamew's body half the year,
> Played at the chess upon the night they died. (*Plays* 117)

That Conchobor has deceived Fergus becomes apparent when a messenger arrives, summoning Deirdre and Fergus, but not Naoise, to the castle.

The chessboard becomes the symbol of Naoise's heroism, but is it a true heroism? He insists on facing death as Lugaidh Redstripe did, with stoical detachment, with "a calm that both defines and limits his heroism" (Moore 134). He says,

> What need have I, that gave up all for love,
> To die like an old king out of a fable,
> Fighting and passionate? What need is there
> For all that ostentation at my setting?" (*Plays* 125).

But when Conchobor appears, Naoise rushes out with his sword, crying "Beast, beast!" and is captured in a net by Conchobor's men. Deirdre tries to adopt Naoise's heroic posture, but her human nature controls her. She begs Naoise to remember "that old vehement, bewildering kiss" (*Plays* 126). When Naoise is killed, "extreme love and extreme bitterness give her her greatest strength," and she keeps "her wits about her to the very end" (Moore 142).

Yeats wanted to make Deirdre a tragic heroine, says Moore. In the legend she has that potential. Like Oedipus, she is born under a tragic prophecy. The prophecy comes true and she dies because of what she has caused. Yet in Yeats's play she does not rebel against her fate. She accepts the role foretold for her. In spite of her defiance of Conchobor at the end, she does not reach tragic heights. She falls short of heroic stature because Naoise has fallen short and Yeats has been unable to imagine her heroism apart from Naoise's, even though he has made her the center of his play. Friel's decision to make his Naoise the central character was a wise one. Frank Hardy comes very close to being a true tragic hero.

The resemblance of *Faith Healer* to the Deirdre legend is more thematic than textual. Friel alters the classic love triangle of a powerful old man and a handsome young man vying for the affection of a beautiful young woman by substituting Grace's father for Conchobor, although a similarity exists in that Conchobor has acted as foster father to Deirdre. In spite of the fateful prophecy, Conchobor has not had her killed but has hidden her away in a cabin in the woods with an old woman to care for her until she shall be old enough to be his queen.

In an important part of Grace's narrative, she gives a capsule view of her relationship with her father. She returns to Ireland determined to express her love and apologies to him, but when he treats her like one of the criminals he sentenced from the bench, she shifts quickly to a desire to defile him with obscenities. Grace's mother has described him as obsessed with order, suggesting that this obsession is the cause of her mental illness. His oppressive devotion to order is what Grace defied and escaped when she ran off with Frank. Thus the conflict between authority and love becomes a central theme of the play just as it is a basic theme in the Deirdre legend, in which Deirdre rebels against Conchobor's control to run away with Naoise.

The first seven years Frank and Grace have spent abroad appear to have been harmonious, though by no means idyllic. Frank insists "it was never a heady relationship" (*FH* 335). References to Grace's triumphant glee at escaping her father's domination suggest that, like Deirdre, she was the instigator of the exodus from Ireland and

that her reason was rebellion against the authority of an implacable older man rather than, or at least as much as, her love for the younger man.

Frank describes Grace as "collapsing on the bed with laughing and kicking her heels in the air" when she read her father's letter accusing Frank of "implicating my only child in your career of chicanery." Frank says he supposed it was "to demonstrate her absolute loyalty to me," but he remembers thinking "how young she *did* look and how cruel her laughter at him [her father] was" (*FH* 371). Grace says that if she had defiled her father with obscenities, it would have been a "final rejection of his tall straight poplars and the family profession [she too had qualified as a solicitor] and his formal Japanese gardens," and "a proud testament to [her] mountebank and the van and the wet timber and the primus stove and the dirty halls and everything he'd call squalor" (*FH* 348-49). Similarly, Synge's Deirdre has taken a carefree, reckless young Naoise "in the top folly of youth" and persuaded him to defy authority and desert Ireland to live with her in the wilds of Scotland (Synge 226). In Yeats's play the musician says:

> A young man, in the laughing scorn of his youth,
> Naoise, the son of Usna, climbed up there,
> And having wooed, or, as some say, been wooed,
> Carried her off. (*Plays* 113)

Deirdre and Grace are the prime movers in the departure from Ireland. Both are also responsible for the return, but in different ways.

Return to Ireland and Sacrificial Death

In Synge, Yeats, and Friel, the lure of Ireland brings the lovers home. Fergus says, "Let you come this day, for there's no place but Ireland where the Gael can have peace always" (Synge 239). Kiberd points out how the ritual reciting of place-names is an ancient Gaelic tradition reaching back to the original legend of Deirdre. We have seen how Friel uses this place-name ritual to serve his purposes. In the ancient legend, before her departure from Scotland, Deirdre "lists the names of all the abandoned places with tender care" (Kiberd "Friel's *Faith Healer*" 107). In Synge's play she laments for Glen Ruadh, Glen Laid, and the Woods of Cuan. She has also regretted leaving Ireland and Slieve Fuadh, where she has "lived always": "Won't I be lonesome and I thinking on the little hill beyond, and the apple-trees do be budding in the spring-time by the post of the door?" (231). When she resolves to return to Ireland she gives as one of her reasons:

> that I'm wishing to set my foot on Slieve Fuadh, where I was running one time and leaping the streams, and that I'd be well pleased to see our little apple-trees . . . behind our cabin on the hill; or that I've learned . . . it's a lonesome thing to be away from Ireland always. (247-48)

As Deirdre takes Naoise back to Ireland and to his death, she and Ireland become one. She becomes the devouring mother of Irish lore and literature, luring young men to their death. Ireland is both the land of heart's desire and the country of death. As the goddess of Ireland, Deirdre is related to the Kali Ma, the Hindu Dark Mother, who is both giver of life and devourer of her children. As the

Leanhaun Shee, she inspires the artist but also drains him of his life. Only in the coalescing of these images does the ending of Friel's drama succeed. The return home represents a chance at restoration and rejuvenation, but it is also strongly associated with death. To go home is to die; dying is, archetypally, going home. Seamus Deane comments on what this return home--especially home to Ireland--represents in Friel's plays:

> Ireland is, of course, a metaphor in these contexts as well as a place. It is the country of the young, of hope, a perfect coincidence between fact and desire. It is also the country of the disillusioned, where everything is permanently out of joint, violent, broken. (*Celtic Revivals* 170-71)

The conclusion of Friel's play leaves us with a set of questions almost as maddening as those Frank Hardy faces. Frank's gift and the impossibility of his separating himself from it are the impediments in his relationship with Grace. Yet the failure of his relationship with Grace destroys his career. Frank, the tormented artist, moves through his life as if controlled by fate in the guise of his "gift." He suffers the maddening questions, the doubts, the failures. Are we to believe he is driven mad by these frustrations and forced to seek death as an answer? Yet he is not mad. He goes to his death with the calm detachment Naoise tried to effect, but he is a defeated man. If we consider the play as realistic drama, we are not satisfied that his death is necessary or right. He has given in too easily to the vicissitudes of life. He leaves Grace and Teddy bereft of his support. Grace will kill herself with the same

motivation as Deirdre, the inability to face life without her lover. Teddy will live on in quiet desperation, drinking and reminiscing, a sad Dickensian figure. Yet, suddenly, in dying, Frank becomes transfigured.

Apart from simple homesickness, the reason for Deirdre and Naoise's return to Ireland is unclear. Why Frank, Grace, and Teddy return to Ireland is ambiguous in the context of Friel's fragmented narrative. Why Christ returns to Jerusalem is not understandable from an earthly perspective. Why each man goes to meet his death, when in a human context he might have avoided it, is not explained. All seem to seek a violent death--or a violent death seeks them. In his final monologue Frank describes his rendezvous with death in the persons of the four wedding guests. He knows they will kill him with the primitive farm implements--an axe, a crowbar, a mallet, and a hay-fork--because his powers will fail him. He will not be able to cure their friend McGarvey, a hopeless cripple. Frank always knows when his powers will *not* work.

As he goes to his death, he sees himself moving through enclosures and openings that take him from darkness to light, from limitation to freedom. His approach to death is like a birth. He goes from the lounge bar into a tiny, dark, cluttered, fetid courtyard. He finds a wooden door and enters a second courtyard, which he "knew at once." He says, "It was a September morning, just after dawn. The sky was orange and everything glowed with a soft radiance--as if each detail of the scene had its own self-awareness and was satisfied with itself." As he moves across the courtyard toward the

arched entrance framing the five figures, we see the details with surreal clarity. We feel the ground beneath his feet "pleasant to walk on because the cobbles were smooth with use." He moves as if in a trance, yet supernaturally aware: "And as I walked I became possessed of a strange and trembling intimation." The elements of the scene have "shed their physical reality and . . . become mere imaginings, and in all existence there was only myself and the wedding guests." Then he has a stronger sense that "even we had ceased to be physical and existed only in spirit, only in the need we had for each other." He experiences "a simple and genuine sense of home-coming. Then for the first time there was no atrophying terror; and the maddening questions were silent. At long last I was renouncing chance" (*FH* 375-76).

This death scene resembles the endings of Flannery O'Connor's stories with their use of violent death and vivid descriptions of natural elements emblazoned on the horizons and in the reader's mind. Frank's description, with its heightened awareness and mystical overtones, is drawn in startling colors and images. One of O'Connor's stories, out of many possible examples, illustrates the similarity. These details appear in the closing pages of "Greenleaf":

> This pasture was smaller than the last, a green arena, encircled almost entirely by woods. . . . She . . . sat down on the front bumper to wait and rest. . . . She did not understand why she should be so tired when it was only mid-morning. Through her closed eyes, she could feel the sun, red-hot overhead. She opened her eyes slightly but the white light forced her to close them again. . . . In a few minutes something emerged from the tree line, a black heavy shadow that tossed its head several times and then bounded forward. . . . She stared at the violent

> black streak bounding toward her as if she had no sense of distance . . . and the bull had buried his head in her lap, like a wild tormented lover. . . . The tree line was a dark wound in a world that was nothing but sky--and she had the look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds the light unbearable. (50-52)

Like Friel, Flannery O'Connor is a Catholic writer who lived in and wrote of a troubled area. In O'Connor's case it was the southern United States during the 1950s--an area where a traditional way of life was undergoing a severe and violent rejection, and the new order replacing it was equally raw and jarring. O'Connor's stories reflect her orthodox Catholic beliefs: man's salvation or damnation is in God's hands; He will bring it about by whatever means He chooses. Christ's sacrifice is reenacted in the violent deaths of her characters, proving that sacrifice is necessary for salvation. Is Frank Hardy's death a punishment for his life, in the way some of O'Connor's characters appear to be punished for mean and selfish lives? Friel has recently commented: "If one takes art as seriously as the faith healer does, as a matter of life and death, that itself is hubristic. You're courting catastrophe" (Gussow " From Ballybeg" 61). Perhaps Hardy's death is a kind of divine retribution.

Yet without his gift, without his dedication to his gift, Frank Hardy would be nothing. Only in the struggle to succeed in his calling does he reach heroic proportions. Like Oedipus, he is a man trapped by fate in the form of a gift. Only in following this gift to the grave does he command our respect. He courts catastrophe and brings catastrophe on himself deliberately--maybe foolishly and wastefully. He is unable to synthesize the disparate elements in his

life. He panders to an erratic appetite, but he does not desert his gift. He makes his choice and suffers for it. Like Oedipus's pride, Frank's *hubris* is the flaw but also the virtue of his life.

Seamus Deane says that in renouncing chance by choosing death, Frank Hardy also renounces his gift: "Thus Friel asserts the lethal quality of the gift, the urge to create wholeness out of distortions" (*Celtic Revivals* 173). But surely it is not the gift Hardy renounces but the life that interferes with the gift. As he goes to meet death *as a faith healer,* he knows that the gift will fail him, but he chooses to follow its calling to the grave rather than forsake it. At any point in his life he could have chosen to give up his calling--to deny his ability to work miracles. He could have become an ordinary man. We have noted that the gift was his essence, as Grace says, and that he would not be the same man without it. Like the artist/playwright, he is driven by the gift, but he *could* cease to be the artist; he could deny the gift; he could make that choice.

Columba, too, has a choice. He chooses, like Frank Hardy, to renounce the life that hindered his ability to follow his calling. If he can conquer the voice of blood, land, and Ireland, he will have stilled the maddening doubts. If not, he will be free of the torment only when he goes to his grave, like Frank Hardy, a saint because of the greatness of his struggle. On the other hand, if *Faith Healer* is a descendant of *Crystal and Fox,* Frank Hardy's sacrifice of himself is a cruel and destructive act, leaving Grace and Teddy to suffer, and gaining only an empty reality for himself.

It is possible to see Naoise compelled to return to Ireland because of honor and loyalty--loyalty that must be attended to in life--loyalty to home and king that cannot be traded for a life of ease and romantic love. Ease and passion do not last; honor and loyalty endure. Deirdre returns because she recognizes that perfect happiness does not exist on this earth. In this world all things fade and grow old. The only peace man or woman can find lies beyond the grave. Frank's reasons for returning may be the same as Deirdre's and Naoise's: loyalty to the gift that is his only claim to honor and a recognition that the perfection he has sought cannot be found on this earth. In death he finds peace and identity. In sacrifice he finds redemption. In this interpretation, *Faith Healer* is the story of all those who have failed and yet succeeded--Christ, Naoise and Deirdre, the artist, the playwright, and Frank Hardy--those who, in giving their life to a cause, have lost their life, but because of the greatness of the cause or because of their unflagging devotion to it, have left their mark.

The strength of Friel's play lies in the questions it raises. The play grows out of a sense of struggle, a sense of problems unresolved, questions that cannot be answered. Sacrifice continues to concern Friel--the puzzling nature of sacrifice as redemptive--of death as the key to life, the gateway to self-knowledge, to peace, to answers. While Flannery O'Connor's stories communicate a sense of conviction, Friel's plays convey a sense of searching. Perhaps the pagan streak in him says, yes, the world is imperfect, but man is ennobled by struggling against it, not by yielding sacrificially to it.

Again Friel is able to contain both ideas in the ending of his play. He manages to maintain a tension between the necessity of sacrifice and the necessity of struggle.

A mystical transformation takes place at the end of the play. When Yeats was plotting *Deirdre* in 1905, he was also working on *The King's Threshold* and *The Shadowy Waters,* in the rewriting of which he was influenced by Wagner, probably by *Tristan und Isolde.* F. S. Colwell sees the climax of both *Tristan und Isolde* and *The Shadowy Waters* as "a struggle between the spiritual and material . . . resolved, or more properly overwhelmed . . . in a medley of night, love, death, and primordial oneness" (132, 135). To some extent, this description fits *Deirdre, Deirdre of the Sorrows,* and *Faith Healer.*

As I suggested earlier, only in the coalescing of Deirdre with the image of Ireland, only when she becomes the devouring muse, the Leanhaun Shee, does the end of the Deirdre legend succeed. Only when Ireland and Grace are seen as joint forces, and as forces for both inspiration and destruction, life and death, does the ending of *Faith Healer* succeed. Though Frank's devotion to his muse has inspired him, it has also controlled him and ultimately drained him of his life. Grace has been merely the vehicle, the accessory. The exiled artist has returned to Ireland to die because Ireland is his muse and has demanded this sacrifice.

Thus the play moves into the realm of true tragedy where blind fate controls the affairs of men. It belongs in the world of pagan otherness where the ways of the gods are beyond the realm of

reason. In this interpretation Frank Hardy becomes a tragic hero and the play "edges toward Sophoclean despair." The tragedy is mitigated, however, by the possibility of other interpretations, by the suggestion that Frank's death is a religious experience, a "birth" and a transformation, and that some understanding, indeed some reward, awaits him on the other side of death. In dying, even though in the world of reality he appears a broken and defeated man, he has mysteriously been sanctified. Without the mythological and allegorical context, *Faith Healer* would still be intriguing and brilliant in its emotional and technical complexity, but it would be greatly impoverished and ultimately unsatisfying in its meaning and significance.

Conclusions

Thousands of Irish men and women have wandered the roads of the world--or the backroads of Ireland itself--exiles and vagabonds on alien soil, or tinkers, tramps, and travelers who live outside society in their own homeland. What do these three plays have to say about them? Others, like Friel, have chosen to remain within the Irish society and face the schizophrenia of their homeland, exiles because they are writers and see with a different eye. Are these plays about them? Friel casts Frank Hardy, the metaphorical artist, as an expatriate, living outside the bounds of society, even living outside its moral order in his unsanctioned relationship with Grace (unsanctioned at least in his account of it) as Irish tinkers have done for centuries. Is he writing of the exiled artist? Seamus Deane

thinks so. Of Frank Hardy he says:

> His capacity to heal others, in other countries and his incapacity to heal himself except by coming back to his own country, dying back into the place out of which his healing came in the first place, is a strange metonym for the gift in exile, the artist abroad. (*Celtic Revivals* 173)

Robinson sees in the conclusion of *Faith Healer* a criticism and a message for present-day Ireland:

> The friends of McGarvey, frustrated at the injustice of their friend's state, abandon any real faith in a miraculous cure. The answer to the frustration is . . . violence. . . . The quest for a reasonable and civilized answer, or for a response through deep-rooted faith in the possibility of a better state of things, is squelched by the brutal hands of Frank's Donegal countrymen. . . . There can and will be no solution to the festering problems of Irish society until the respect and the need for others is felt. (227)

This last is certainly a valid comment on the Irish situation, but it falls short of the deeper meaning of Friel's play. Frank's gift fails when he returns to Ireland. But does it fail because Ireland lacks faith in him? His powers had begun to fail in Scotland because of events that happened there. Perhaps his powers have failed because of his long absence from Ireland, because he has lacked the sustaining influence of his roots. Deirdre and Naoise die when they return to Ireland, but the reason for their death is not the return but the initial departure--the desertion of duty and loyalty to Ireland.

The Irish exile departs to find success, escape from repression, and freedom from frustration and violence. He may find

these things, but Friel's work always suggests that, by leaving, the exile may lose the capacity to feel deeply. This capacity is a necessity for the writer, the artist, and the faith healer, but it is a vital part of any person's life. The exile has traded the spiritual for the material, always a poor exchange. A return to Ireland means a return to life. It may also mean death, but the death has been caused not by the return but by the departure. The exile is doomed to wander the world bereft of a part of himself. When he chooses to follow a gift, a calling, or a dream, he sacrifices something valuable. The sacrifice is never without its pain. If the gift is important, if the calling is great enough, the dedication is worth the sacrifice. If it is an empty dream, the exile will be left with Fox Melarkey's empty reality.

CHAPTER IV
FATHERS, SONS, AND DAUGHTERS: THE FAMILY CONFLICT

"*Sarah*: Your father'll never shift. And you wouldn't leave him behind. You couldn't leave him alone." --*The Gentle Island (17)*

Three of Friel's plays operate within the context of a single close-knit family unit. A father-son conflict forms the emotional vortex of each, but two of the three encompass father-daughter relationships as well. The fathers are symbols of strong authority, both in the family and in their community of influence, but their familial authority is impaired or usurped during the course of the play. The plays are *Living Quarters, Aristocrats,* and *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

S. B. O'Donnell (*Philadelphia*), County Councillor and owner of a general shop where his son Gareth works, suffers from chronic taciturnity. He talks to his son only to give orders or to make inane comments on the mundane events of daily life. Commandant Frank Butler of *Living Quarters* commands a "remote and run-down army camp in the wilds of County Donegal" (*LQ* 178), but has performed with distinguished heroism when his company served the United Nations in the Middle East. During his absence, however, his only son Ben has had an affair with Frank's young second wife. When Frank learns this, he commits suicide. District Justice Bernard O'Donnell in *Aristocrats* has suffered a series of strokes that have left him bedridden and senile. His presence is felt only through a voice over a

"baby tender" until he makes one entrance near the end of the play and drops dead onstage.

The families in these plays have typical Irish problems. A son prepares to emigrate to America; a family in a remote army post is cut off not only from the rest of the world, but also from their fellow citizens, because their military father and aristocratic mother have scorned to associate with the peasantry; a family of the fallen Catholic gentry suffers the loss of prestige and luxury. The children of these families, now adults, display a variety of psychological maladjustments.

In each play the family serves as a microcosm of society. When the central authority is impotent or ineffectual, the members of the society suffer frustration and alienation. When the authority exerts oppressive control, the members become emotionally damaged. Their development is thwarted, their lives are blighted, and their personalities become warped. When the authority figure falls, the family disintegrates; the microcosmic society collapses. Yet in the context of Friel's plays, the father as the authority figure functions not as a hated tyrant, but as the focus of his family's need for love, support, and guidance. When he fails them, they see his failure as human weakness. He is a misguided, but not a malign, force in their lives. As typical family situations, the plays are believable. As a microcosm of society, they suggest that the problems of society be viewed as the same knotty fusion of love and hate, respect and resentment, need for control and desire for freedom, that exists in a family. Friel has said, in fact, in regard to

the problems in Derry in 1973:

> I don't think the gap is too wide to be breached. People are pliable and generous. In a family the most outrageous things may be said, yet within a week, although they have not been forgotten, they can be glossed over. The same can apply to our religious and political differences. (Qtd. in Hickey and Smith 221)

In these plays Friel not only depicts Ireland's problems, but also comments on the universal conflict that exists between authority and love, between ruler and subject, between oppressor and oppressed.

The Father-Son Conflict in Irish Terms

In Chapter III, we have seen something of the way the image of Ireland as a woman figures in Friel's dramatic imagination. Like Irish writers before him, he recognizes the centuries-old convention of personifying his country as an archetypal nurturing female. He counters this image of "Mother Ireland" with that of the devouring female. On the other hand, as Thomas O'Grady points out, "At times . . . and with great immediacy, the figure of the father also appears in literature as an immovable force in the sensitive individual's struggle for personal identity and independence in modern Ireland" (72).

O'Grady cites Joyce and Synge as Irish writers who have portrayed father-son conflicts in this light. Joyce's autobiographical protagonist Stephen Dedalus expresses conflicting emotions toward his father throughout *A Portrait of the Artist as a*

Young Man and *Ulysses.* As O'Grady says, "Frustrated and humiliated by the dissipation and the ineffectualness of his father, sundered from him and his generation by 'an abyss of fortune or of temperament' (Joyce *Portrait* 95)," Stephen "pursues an antithetical course" (72). In Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World,* Christy Mahon's "murder" of his father is the act that undergirds his heroism. He says characteristically, "I'm thinking Satan hasn't many have killed their da in Kerry, and in Mayo too" (79). Although Christy's patricide proves to be more symbolic than real, he emerges as the victor in the struggle in which he and his father become reconciled. Synge seems to be saying that a son must "kill" not his father, but the domination of his father, before he can become a man. Sean O'Casey's play *Juno and the Paycock* and Daniel Corkery's short story "Rock-of-the-Mass" depict father-son conflicts in which fathers have played a part in the deaths--either real or figurative--of their sons.

Contemporary Irish writers Hugh Leonard, in his Broadway success *Da,* and Seamus Heaney in his poetry carry the father-son conflict beyond the grave. In his poem "Follower," Heaney expresses much the same idea Leonard does in his play. Both are painfully aware of the discrepancy between their way of life and that of their fathers. Both are haunted by images of their fathers following them. Heaney says,

> I wanted to grow up and plough,
> To close one eye, stiffen my arm.
> All I ever did was follow
> In his broad shadow round the farm.

> I was a nuisance, tripping, falling,
> Yapping always. But today
> It is my father who keeps stumbling
> Behind me, and will not go away. (*Death* 24-25)

Although father-son conflicts are by no means limited to Irish literature, one wonders at the prevalence and centrality of the theme in modern Irish writing. What is it about the Irish situation that makes this conflict so acute? One answer lies in the custom on Irish farms of forcing grown sons to remain at home as "boys" well into middle age, thus categorically frustrating their maturation and creating a perfect environment for the ripening of father-son rivalries and bitterness. This custom grows out of a complicated cultural context that has been explained by Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball in their study *Family and Community in Ireland,* a study based on two years of research in County Clare during 1931-32.

The greatest single factor in shaping modern Ireland was the succession of famines in the early 1800s, culminating in the Great Famine of 1845. Following these famines, Ireland's economy went into a decline characterized by a drastic decrease in population over the next one hundred or so years. The drop in population was due partly to starvation and disease, partly to emigration, and partly to low marriage rates.

Arensberg and Kimball believe the low marriage and high emigration rates resulted not so much from famine and political factors as from a complex socio-economic tradition among Ireland's farm families, a marriage arrangement called "matchmaking."

Almost universally practiced among small landholders until the late 1920s, matchmaking was the only respectable way of marrying. A match was a contractual arrangement made by the families of both marrying parties and involving disposal of properties. When a farming father decided to retire and had made his choice of an heir from among his sons, he cast around for a suitable wife for that son. Although the son could select a woman who suited him, and the woman could accept or refuse, all negotiations were in the hands of the son and the fathers, with an outsider as go-between. The men decided how much money the girl's father would pay, how much the son's inheritance was worth, and whether they could agree on the match. When the match was made, legal agreements were drawn up transferring the farm and all appurtenances to the son in exchange for the portion brought in by the wife. This portion or dowry went to the father and mother to distribute as they saw fit to the remaining sons and daughters. Arensberg and Kimball conclude:

> Late marriage and the high incidence of bachelorhood are associable with the reluctance of the old couple to renounce their leadership, the necessity of acquiring sufficient means to portion children, and the delay in dispersing the closed corporation of the family group until it is possible to establish the new one. The identification of a single immediate family with the individual farm prevents the setting up of more than one new such group upon the land. (149)

Sons, and sometimes daughters too, were virtually trapped on the farms until fathers decided to relinquish their authority. Emphasizing the subordinate role sons are forced to play, Arensberg and Kimball say:

> As the son becomes adult and takes on more and more of the heavy tasks of the farm work, he never escapes his father's direction until his father dies or makes over the farm to him at his marriage. . . . Even though the major work of the farm devolves upon the sons, they have no control of the direction of farm activities nor of the disposal of farm income. . . . Thus the small farmer and his sons are often seen at the fairs and markets together, but it is the farmer-father who does the bargaining. Once when one of the authors asked a countryman about this at a potato market, he explained that he could not leave his post for long because his full-grown son "isn't well known yet and isn't a good hand at selling." If the son wants a half crown to go to a hurley match or to take a drink on market day with friends, he must get it from his father. . . . Even at forty-five and fifty, if the old couple have not yet made over the farm, the countryman remains a "boy" in respect to farm work and in the rural vocabulary. (51-56)

Fathers frequently resorted to corporal punishment of their sons, especially in the years from seven to puberty. During these years the son was removed from the sympathetic control of the mother but had not yet entered into a relationship of full partnership with the father. Instead of close companionship with the father, the son developed "a marked respect, expressing itself in the tabooing of many actions, such as smoking, drinking, and physical contact of any sort." As a result, "the antagonisms inherent in such a situation" would often erupt when conflicts arose (Arensberg and Kimball 56).

Although sons in urban settings do not as often remain at home as "boys," A. J. Humphreys in *New Dubliners: Urbanization and the Irish Family* (1966) describes the same strained relationships between fathers and sons. The Irish father's "affection for his infants of both sexes and his often boring pride in them" is so

remarkable as to be a matter of frequent comment by foreign visitors. A general change takes place, however, in the parental attitude as children reach the age of seven or eight. Parents, especially fathers, then become very severe in their treatment of children. Parents do not show much affection toward children, "are inclined to keep them in their place, and do not allow them much self expression or initiative." The father becomes "remote and indifferent." One explanation for this attitude is the parent's conviction that life is hard and children must be hardened to it. One father put it this way: "We have been oppressed for so long that the Irish father has the conviction that life is a rather bleak proposition, and he has to make his children realize that" (145-46). Humphreys finds, however, that

> by comparison with the preceding generation of parents, the New Dubliner artisans are extremely close to their adolescent children and very liberal towards them. . . . Nevertheless, it appears that what may be considered remnants of the former father-son relationship are still prevalent. Preeminent among these is the attitude of the father that his sons, even in late adolescence, are boys who cannot do anything right and to whom, in the world of practical affairs, it is folly to give any initiative. (146, 160)

Reflected in the attitudes of the Irish fathers described above lies a second explanation for the prevalence of father-son conflicts in Irish literature--an explanation that grows out of a combination of historical, religious, and economic conditions that is uniquely Irish. We have noted in Chapter II how the English nation attempted to mold Ireland's people and culture to suit its purposes, and

succeeded in instilling feelings of inferiority and a poor self-image in the Irish.

The Catholic Church, too, has wielded great influence in shaping Irish attitudes. As A. J. Humphreys observes, among Irish Catholics religion is a heritage, practiced without question and rarely discussed (158). He quotes an Irish professional man on the Irish fear of an intellectual approach to religion:

> If you were to advocate an intellectual grounding in the faith, . . . that people be trained more in the knowledge of their religion and in theology, you'd be accused of being a rationalist and of promoting secularism. You would be creating an intelligentsia who have always caused us trouble here, who have been the ones who have lost their faith and created a good deal of disturbance. . . . The general opinion is that we Irish have been through a tremendous amount of suffering for our faith, and we have stood up to it for five hundred years. Therefore, when you advocate any sort of changes, you are questioned whether or not you can produce men and women as sturdy and strong in their faith as the Irish have proved themselves to be. The attitude is: after all, if a man leads a good Catholic life, if he goes to the Sacraments, if he is faithful to his religious duties, brings his children up well, educates them and sees that they have the faith, that is the essence of life. (159)

Thus the Catholic Church functions as a paternalistic authority, providing a great source of strength, but also discouraging the Irish people from taking full responsibility for their actions.

As long as people's decisions are made for them, they never develop their full potential as human beings. They remain, in one sense, childlike. Being childlike is not entirely undesirable--Irish warmth and humor, Irish whimsy and imagination are part of a childlike nature. But when it comes to Irish fathers, this basic

immaturity, aggravated by feelings of inferiority, frustration, and rage resulting from their oppressed condition, has frequently manifested itself in one of two ways. Either the father is an outwardly jovial, happy-go-lucky fellow, always ready for a good jar of whiskey and a good song, but a poor provider for his family, or he is a bully. The father who feels his authority usurped by some outside authority becomes weak, abdicating his responsibility for the family, or he becomes excessively and unreasonably domineering, keeping his sons in a subjugated position because he feels insecure himself.

Thus, the English nation and the Catholic Church have helped to shape the character of Irish fathers. To these forces one must add terrible periods of extreme poverty when fathers were unable to provide even food for their families. Marilyn Throne has commented on the disintegration of authority among Irish fathers:

> For all a father means to any of us, he must also be our definition of our society, of its laws and its justice, of its artistry and its imagination. Perhaps the mother is too rapidly cast into symbolically spiritual--and therefore heroic--roles, and thus eludes the bitterness of reality. Or perhaps the Irish writers are consistent within their culture; for if a culture, like the Irish or the American black, is deprived of its sovereignty, then the societal role of the father as symbol and reality of authority must be eroded, and forever there can be no relationship between the father and his children except one of a frustration that ultimately exposes the impotence of the father and the crippling of the children. (172)

In Irish literature, father-son conflicts function in three ways: literally, as a reflection of the actual conditions in Ireland;

psychologically, as an indication of the need for the father to mend his ways or for the son to throw off the yoke of the father's dominance; and symbolically, as a representation of the need for Ireland to throw off the yokes which make it impossible for men to be good fathers. Brian Farrington clearly recognized this last symbolic purpose in Synge's *Playboy* when he wrote his "Homage to J. M. Synge":

> There was always the imperial Parent, looking on,
> Time-honoured know-all, brooking no answer back,
> Responsible, deprecating, self-appointed
> Author of our achievements,
> Always there, the strict correct paternal
> Umpire that his sons would never set on.
>
> You couldn't have understood what you were doing, . . .
> And yet, tenebrous mollycoddle with the silver tongue,
> It came from you, or through you, it was yours,
> The stark triumphant image, faked out in prancing words,
> New Nation. No wonder they couldn't take it,
> The Independent readers in their pit,
> No wonder they tried to chase you from the stage
> When you reached for the loy to split that meddler's crown.[11]

Philadelphia, Here I Come!

In Friel's *Philadelphia* it is not the crown of the father or of England that is split, but the psyche of the son. Private Gar and Public Gar are on stage at the same time throughout the play. Private Gar can be heard only by Public Gar, but Public never looks at him. As Friel says, "One cannot look at one's *alter ego.*" Friel

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[11]Qtd. in Watson 75. The poem was published in the *Irish Times,* 17 Apr. 1971.

describes Private Gar as "the unseen man, the man within, the conscience, the secret thoughts, the id" (*Phil* 27). By this fragmentation of his main character Friel introduces a new kind of drama to Ireland, launches his first internationally successful play, and provides the rest of the world with a clearer understanding of Ireland's problems. After a long run in Dublin, *Philadelphia* opened on Broadway on February 16, 1966, where it ran for nine months before moving to London.

The Cultural Context

In addition to presenting a father-son conflict, the play addresses the problem of emigration, and a serious problem it has been for the Irish. Close to 2,000,000 emigrants fled Ireland's shores between 1848 and 1855; by 1914 another 3,500,000 had left. Arensberg and Kimball report that Ireland's total population dropped from 6,548,000 in 1841 to only 2,963,000 in 1926. The 1936 census showed emigration continuing unabated (94, 221).

Historians and sociologists are puzzled by Ireland's failure to recover from the famine years and develop economically, and by the way in which droves of emigrants have continued to drain the country of its young men and women. Joseph Lee observes that, although 800,000 people, about ten per cent of the population, died of hunger and disease between 1845 and 1851, this famine was not unique. The death rate had frequently been equalled in earlier European famines, possibly in Ireland itself during the famine of 1740-41. "What was peculiar," Lee says, "was the long-term

response of Irish society to this short-term calamity" (1). Lee blames the flood of emigration more on a change in "subjective mentalities" than on "objective realities," saying, "The crux of the matter was that the rise in the labourer's standard of living lagged behind the rise in his aspirations" (8). Between 1848 and 1914, Ireland experienced the slowest rate of growth of national income in western Europe, about 0.5 per cent per annum.

The matchmaking system also encouraged emigration. If a large dowry was received from the match, it was divided to furnish dowries for the sisters and to finance education for the brothers to prepare them for professions or business. When money was scarce, however, sons and daughters, were obliged to "travel." That is, they would leave the area for work in the city or emigrate to other countries.

The action in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* takes place in "the present," or the 1960s, when it was written. Ireland's economy has improved, and the matchmaking system is generally obsolete. Emigration, however, is still a very real possibility for Ireland's young men and women. Conditions that caused them to immigrate in the past are still surprisingly the same in rural areas, as Friel's play shows. For the first time, Friel uses remote Ballybeg as his setting.

Gar's father S. B., or Screwballs as Gar calls him privately, is old enough to be Gar's grandfather. True to rural custom, though he is a shopkeeper and not a farmer, he has married late in life and has taken a young wife. He was forty; she was nineteen, from

Bailtefree, beyond the mountains, "and her eyes were bright, and her hair was loose, . . . and many a night he must have heard her crying herself to sleep." But "she thought he was the grandest gentleman that ever lived . . . and he--he couldn't take his eyes off her" (*Phil* 37). She died three days after Gar was born.

Although critics believe S. B.'s taciturnity and gruff nature resulted from this sudden loss of his young wife, the happiness he and his son both remember sharing when Gar was a child occurs shortly after her death. S. B. expresses, though not to Gar, the pride he took in his young son. He recalls to Madge an image of Gar in a "wee sailor suit" (which Madge says he never had), refusing to go to school because, he said, "I'm going into my father's business." Finally, S. B. has had to take him to school and his words are clearly those of a doting father: "the two of us, hand in hand, as happy as larks--we were that happy, Madge--and him dancing and chatting beside me--mind?--you couldn't get a word in edge-ways with all the chatting he used to go through" (*Phil* 97). Then S. B. wonders if problems came because he was too old to be a father and too old for his young wife.

This insight into S. B.'s character, revealed very late in the play, suggests the typical Irish father, affectionate and doting in a child's first years, but then, true to the sociologist's picture, becoming stern and "hard," allowing his son no freedom, trusting him with no responsibilities, and admitting no displays of affection on either side. Gar complains that, although he is twenty-five years old, his father treats him as if he were five: "I can't order even a

dozen loaves without getting your permission." He complains that his father pays him less than he pays Madge, his housekeeper, though it is clear from his conversation that he essentially runs the shop for his father. This situation again reflects the Irish custom of keeping sons in a subservient position until the father dies or retires, even though most of the work and responsibility falls to the son.

Madge is one of the many Irish women who never marry and thus never have a home or family of their own. The sadness of her situation is revealed in two ways. First, we see the importance she places on the birth of her niece's child and on the possibility that the parents will name the child "Madge" after her, and her disappointment when they don't. Second we see her relationship with Gar. She is the only "mother" he has known; he the only "son" she has ever had. Yet, their relationship is marked by restraint, by joking, banter, horseplay, and Madge's sarcastic remarks--all to cover the real affection they have for each other--an affection revealed by Private Gar, whose words can only be heard by Public Gar: "Madge, Madge, I think I love you more than any of them. Give me a piece of your courage, Madge" (*Phil* 47). After the break-up of his relationship with Katie Doogan, Madge is the only person Gar can talk to.

We learn of this break-up through a flashback. Although Kate obviously prefers Gar to the Dublin doctor her parents have selected, the marriage plans she and Gar have made are dashed when Gar is unable to ask her father for her hand. His hesitancy appears to be a

failure of nerve--has he inherited his father's chronic reticence?--and losing Kate leaves "a deep scar on the aul skitter of [his] soul" (*Phil* 44). In reality, his failure results directly from feelings of inferiority because his father allows him no position of importance or substantial income of his own. As he and Kate make plans, she insists they need more money than his meager salary. Gar suggests that maybe his father will "die--tonight--of galloping consumption!" (*Phil* 40). He is joking, but only the death of his father would bring him into control of a business and money enough to marry Kate. Furthermore, Kate's marriage to Dr. King follows the Irish custom that insists on marriages within the same social class. This fact becomes clear to Gar as Senator Doogan speaks of his association with King's father in the university "when he did medicine and I [Doogan] did law" (*Phil* 43). Gar knows he is defeated before he opens his mouth.

Gar's conversation with three of his friends reveals another break-down in communication and another aspect of the Irish situation that causes young men to emigrate. His friends brag about their physical and sexual prowess as they talk of how they will win the game the next day and of how many girls they have had or will soon have. In truth, they, like Gar, are virgins. Their lives are dead-end streets; they have little chance of marrying or of escaping their vacuous existence. They cannot broach the subject of Gar's departure because it is too devastating to their fragile egos. Gar cannot talk their language because by planning to emigrate he has removed himself from their world and sees it for what it is.

The other visitors of the evening are Master Boyle, Canon Mick O'Byrne, and Kate Doogan--now Mrs. King. Boyle, Gar's former schoolmaster, represents the kind of father he might have had (Boyle had been one of Gar's mother's suitors), and the kind of life he might still have if he stays in Ballybeg. Boyle lives on illusions: that he will get a job in a reputable American university, that his poems will be published, that he will not lose his job even though he has frequent run-ins with the Canon, that his students appreciate him (he believes Gar gave him a packet of cigarettes and a jar of jam), and that he will be able to pay Gar back the money he lends him to buy drink. He is a loser, but, though he belittles Gar's intelligence, he has real affection for him.

Gar sees himself in Boyle. Like Gar, he might have had a different life if he had "gotten the girl." Like Gar, he speaks words he doesn't mean. In one breath he tells Gar to forget Ballybeg and Ireland, and in the next he begs Gar to write him. Of America he says, "I gather it's a vast restless place that doesn't give a curse about the past; and that's the way things should be. Impermanence and anonymity--it offers great attractions" (*Phil* 52). When Kate comes to say goodby, Gar uses the same words to her in his confusion and distress, with no more sincerity than Boyle.

The visit of Canon O'Byrne is another matter. He comes to visit S. B., not Gar, as he comes every evening, for a game of checkers. Although the visit of the priest represents another typical occurrence in Ireland, Private Gar's attitude toward him reflects a changing attitude toward the priest in recent Irish fiction, mirroring

a changing attitude toward him in Irish life. When today's writer "engages the priest, so to speak," as Seán McMahon points out, "There is no perfunctory anti-clericalism, but there is criticism--often for failure to understand the problems of [his] people or for interference in a crass way in a delicate private situation" ("The Priest" 110). McMahon cites Private's speech as perhaps the best statement in recent Irish literature of the attitude which takes the priest to task for incompetence:

> I'm wasting my time with you, Canon--Screwballs here is different; there's an affinity between Screwballs and me that no one . . . could understand--except you, Canon (*Deadly serious*), because you're warm and kind and soft and sympathetic--all things to all men--because you could translate all this loneliness, this groping, this dreadful bloody buffoonery into Christian terms that will make life bearable for us all. And yet you don't say a word. Why, Canon? . . . Isn't this your job?--to translate? Why don't you speak, then? Prudence, arid Canon? Prudence be damned! Christianity isn't prudent--it's insane! (*Phil* 88)

The episode in which the communication block reaches its climax centers on the question of the blue boat. Gar harbors a memory of a time he and his father were fishing on Louch na Cloc Cor in a blue boat. In the memory S. B. put his coat around Gar and his hat on Gar's head and suddenly sang "All Round My Hat I'll Wear a Green Coloured Ribbono." The memory is important because of the feeling of happiness Gar associates with it. In the final scene of the play, Gar asks his father if he remembers the episode. S. B. recalls fishing on the lake with Gar in various boats, one of which might have been blue, but the particular moment Gar thinks he remembers

has slipped from his father's mind, if indeed it ever existed. Disappointed, Gar realizes that he will depart for America without ever communicating his affection to his father or receiving any expression of affection from him.

Ironically, immediately after Gar leaves the room, Madge enters and S. B. tells her of his memory of taking Gar to school in the blue sailor suit Madge says he never had. Friel makes it plain that both memories are possibly fictions created as symbols of a happy time each person cherishes. As such they function also as symbols of the separateness of two lives--lives in which the same yearnings exist, but because they have been given different images they can never be shared until the images can be recognized for what they are--merely different symbols for the same shared need. The irony in such a situation may easily be transferred to Ireland--a country divided because common needs have devolved onto different images and symbols so that they can no longer be recognized as shared. A new consciousness must be formed that recognizes the images and illusions for what they are.

James Coakley says that the play

> looks at, accepts, and understands human limitations, insisting, as does all comedy, that people do not change, learn nothing, but somehow go on. . . . It is a play of indecision, ambiguity, uncertainty, where loneliness is omni-present, but never mentioned; where love is hidden, denied, or non-existent. (197)

Coakley is only partially correct. Nowhere in the play is love non-existent, as we shall see when we look at Friel's fragmentations.

Fragmentations

The use of two actors to play the main character is Friel's first technical exploration of his theme of fragmentation. By splitting Gar into the inner and the outer man, Friel is able to explore the consciousness of an isolated, alienated individual, a theme that, according to Christopher Murray, was new to Irish drama:

> Friel was the first playwright to give voice to the new Irishman, restless and discontent not because he is an artist figure being crushed by society . . . but simply because his is a modern sensibility discovering human isolation. ("Friel and After" 17)

Murray also points to the inconclusive ending as expressing "an agnosticism impossible to earlier Irish drama." By dividing the character, Friel can have Private Gar raise the question: "why do you have to leave? Why? Why?" forcing Public Gar to admit, "I don't know. I-I-I don't know" (*Phil* 99). After Irish plays of the 1950s, where plots had to have a definite ending and characters did not go around "talking to themselves and saying they didn't know," *Philadelphia* was a definite breakthrough (Murray "Friel and After" 17). Friel concludes with an ending more open than that of *The Enemy Within*, the play immediately preceding *Philadelphia*. He thus establishes his pattern of indeterminate conclusions and forces us to examine Gar's emotional conflict.

Few critics have observed that Gar and his father are communicating. They are communicating without words their

embarrassment at not being able speak their affection for one another. Private Gar says to Screwballs, who cannot hear him, "*we embarrass one another*" (*Phil* 49). He also speaks, as we have seen above, of "an affinity" between Screwballs and himself. If the non-verbal communication between Gar and his father was not present, the intense need Gar feels for words would not exist. If he felt no bond between his father and himself, the problem would disappear. If Screwballs felt nothing, his embarrassment would vanish. This situation, which Friel develops with subtlety and irony, gives the play its intensity, an emotional depth that audiences respond to, even if critics overlook it.

Friel has a strong sense of the non-verbal. A discussion of the way characters reveal their feelings non-verbally in the play would belabor the obvious, but the very fragmenting of Gar into public and private selves takes cognizance of the inner self, the thoughts and emotions that are not usually verbalized. Although the play presents a catalogue of valid reasons for leaving Ireland, the fragmenting of the main character allows Friel to reveal simultaneously the terrible price to be paid for leaving, the risks inherent in such a step, and the anguish of the decision. Even the theme song contains the second line: "Right back where I started from," suggesting that Gar himself recognizes he is trading his father's taciturn sternness and stolidity for his Aunt Lizzie's erratic vulgarity. When Public Gar begins to weaken in his resolve to emigrate, Private urges him not to think, not to be quiet, but to keep busy, to sing, to dance. In moments of emotional intensity when Gar seems about to give in to

his desire to stay in Ireland, Private--and sometimes Public--quote the lines:

> It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France, then the Dauphiness, at Versailles, and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in. (*Phil* 36, 38, 50, 78, 80)

These are lines with which few playgoers will be familiar.[12] The quotation is from Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France.*[13] Pine says the purpose of the passage is

> to offer gratuitously another vision, of grace, beauty and splendor which has been dashed by a senseless world; against it Gar and his father can measure their own memories, presided over by the vanished queen of their own lives. (77)

The lines exist entirely in Gar's mind and are never spoken in the hearing of anyone else, so they are not directly relevant to his father's memories, but they do occur once when Gar is thinking about his mother and twice when he is thinking about Kate Doogan.

Edmund Burke and the Queen of France

When *Philadelphia* was revived in New York in 1990, one of the managers of the production said that the cast had received a letter from Friel in response to some questions. One thing he told

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[12]Compare the lines from John Gay in *Dancing at Lughnasa,* Chapter VIII, for another quotation which the audience would not recognize.

[13]See Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (New York: Penquin, 1979) 169.

them was not to worry about the meaning of this quotation.[14] The context of the original lines is not crucially significant in a performance. The suggestion of lost beauty and romance that the lines contain, and the jarring effect when they interrupt the continuity of the play, are the important factors on the stage. Their source, however, sheds interesting light on Friel's choice.

In the introduction to his edition of Burke's *Reflections,* Conor Cruise O'Brien cites this "famous passage about the Queen of France which many have been taught to think of as typical Burke" as an example of Burke's "Jacobite" manner, "both Gothic and pathetic." It is typical, Cruise O'Brien says, but of only one of Burke's three manners. The other two are his "Whig" manner--"rational, perspicacious and business-like"--and "a peculiar kind of furious irony." Burke employs his pure "Jacobite" or "theatrical" manner sparingly. Much of the force of the Queen passage, says O'Brien, "comes from a change of tone, a catch in the voice, an emotional break through a rational crust," making one aware of a "reserve of underlying emotion." Burke uses the passage to suggest "something of the pathos and glamour of a lost cause" (C. C. O'Brien 42-47). The passage functions in precisely the same way in Friel's play.

O'Brien sees Burke as harassed by the same tension we have observed in "the Irish mind," as well as in many of Friel's characters, and to some extent in Friel himself. Although he lived

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[14]In conversation with the present writer, South Street Theater, New York, July 1990.

and worked in England, Burke was Irish-born. O'Brien describes him as "Irish to the marrow of his bones" (41) and quotes T. H. D. Mahoney's comment: "like every other responsible and intelligent Irishman with sufficient heart from that day to this, Burke carried Ireland round with him as his personal 'old man of the sea.'"[15] Although Burke was baptized and educated in the Church of England, his mother, his wife, and other members of his family were Catholics. O'Brien believes his sympathies lay with Irish Catholics and that from this affection comes "the tremendous emotional force that animates . . . all his writings on the Revolution." The drama and power of his writings come from "the collaboration in them of two personalities," from "a tension that long existed between Burke's public *persona* and so important a part of his feelings as that which concerned his people and the land of his birth" (37).

O'Brien builds a convincing case for Burke's releasing into his counter-revolutionary writings a "suppressed revolutionary part of his own personality." In what appears to be a strong defense of the established order in England, Burke delivers a heavy blow *against* the established order in Ireland and also against "the dominant system of ideas in England itself" (35). As a member of the Whig party in England, Burke had been forced to support the Glorious Revolution of 1688. This revolution, however, was responsible for the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland, the legalized supremacy of the Protestant minority over the Catholic majority. As an Irishman, Burke "detested the Protestant Ascendancy" (O'Brien 35). He argued

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[15] *Edmund Burke and Ireland* (London, 1960) ix, qtd. in O'Brien 33.

to the nobility and gentry of England that their interests coincided with Catholicism in Europe, and that Protestantism, especially the militantly anti-Catholic Protestantism of the Dissenters, was the "natural seed-bed of Jacobinism" (38). This argument, if accepted, would undermine the Protestant Ascendency in Ireland.

Ironically, Burke uses his great powers of reason to argue for "superstition" over reason. He uses emotional language to sway his readers. O'Brien sees him as the first modern propagandist: "the first to be conscious of a need for organized effort, adequately financed, and reinforced by 'State action,' to mould public opinion on questions of ideology and international policy" (51). By deliberate policy he uses his "Jacobite manner" with its Gothic theatricality and romanticism to reach his reader's emotions. The Queen passage is an attempt to awaken his readers' sympathies, to arouse their passions, and to persuade their hearts.

Conclusions

When the background of the "Queen of France" passage is understood, Friel's irony becomes clear. Although Burke's position on the French Revolution was later embraced and he was restored to royal favor, and although his arguments have been used down to the present day by liberals and conservatives alike, he did not succeed in what Cruise O'Brien sees as his hidden but primary goal, that of breaking the power of the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland. Although Gar utters the passage as a cry from his soul for his most dire need, the cry never reaches his father, and as far as Gar knows,

he never breaks through his father's crust of reason to touch his heart. The passage, intended to "suggest something of the pathos and glamour of a lost cause," comes to represent this lost cause not only in Gar's and his father's past life where both have lost love and happiness, not only in the outcome of the play where Gar and S. B. fail to reach each other, but also in the life of the man who first wrote it. Here is triple irony.

Here, too, is an example of how Friel's plays afford a new and startling insight into an Irish problem. *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* reveals that the cause of the Irish emigrant is a lost one. Just as Frank Hardy, the faith healer, could not escape his identity, his essence, his "calling," so Gar can never escape himself. He will carry his public and private *personae* to Philadelphia, and possibly back to Ballybeg. Philadelphia will not be a golden gate to some "promised land." Although Gar may find happiness and success there, he will "carry Ireland round with him like his personal 'old man of the sea,'" and like Heaney in his poem, he will find his father stumbling after him, refusing to go away. The play may end in unresolved ambiguity, but of these things we are certain. Friel has made sure of that.

Living Quarters: After Hippolytus

Cultural Background

Friel acknowledges his source for *Living Quarters* in his subtitle "*After Hippolytus.*" In this play he couches the father-son conflict in the classical Greek myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus, the

prototype of the triangle involving a father, a young wife, and a grown son by a former wife. Phaedra, the wife of Theseus, falls in love with Hippolytus, Theseus's son by an earlier liaison with an Amazon woman. When this love is communicated to Hippolytus, he rejects it. Phaedra then kills herself, leaving a note saying Hippolytus has raped her. Theseus believes the note, banishes Hippolytus, and asks Poseidon to kill him. As Hippolytus rides near the shore in his chariot, a huge wave rushes toward him, carrying a monstrous bull which frightens his horses. The chariot is dashed against the rocks and Hippolytus, caught in the reins, is dragged to his death by the horses.

The basic outline is a pattern story, one of those forms of fiction which seem to grow naturally out of people's minds and human experience. It resembles the Biblical story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Potiphar has bought Joseph when his brothers sold him into slavery, but Joseph so impresses Potiphar with his ability that Potiphar entrusts everything in his house to him--everything except his wife, of course. Potiphar's wife repeatedly asks Joseph to lie with her, but he refuses. Finally she catches him by his cloak, but he slips out of the cloak and escapes, leaving the garment in her hands. She then accuses him of raping her, and Potiphar throws him in prison.

According to Robert Graves, both stories are borrowed from the Egyptian *Tale of the Two Brothers* or from a common Canaanite source. The chariot crash became a familiar icon associated with the end of a king's reign and appears in ancient Ireland where the

wave was pictured with a bull or seal poised open-mouthed on its crest. The Irish associated it with a prophetic roaring of the November sea warning the king that his hour was at hand (6).

The myth is also recounted by Sir James Frazer in "The King of the Wood." He believes Hippolytus was the lover of Artemis, not just her devoted follower as a hunter. Besides being goddess of the hunt, Artemis was a goddess of fertility and must therefore have been fertile herself and had a male consort ("King" 280). This contradicts Euripides who depicts Hippolytus as celibate and explains Phaedra's passion for him as a spell cast by Aphrodite, goddess of sexual love, who was angry that Hippolytus had spurned her. One version of the myth, however, relates that Artemis rescued Hippolytus and transported him to the sacred grove at Italian Aricia. There he became Verbius, the first King of the Wood, and the grove became the Grove of Diana and the Grove of the Golden Bough.

Sophocles made a tragedy of the story of Hippolytus; Euripides made two, one of which has survived. Seneca in *Phaedra,* Jean Racine in *Phèdre,* Eugene O'Neill in *Desire under the Elms,* Robinson Jeffers in *The Cretan Woman,* and now Brian Friel, have dramatized it. Each dramatist has given the myth a different interpretation. Friel has inverted the ending so that the father Frank Butler dies instead of his son Ben. By examining early forms of the myth, however, we see that although Hippolytus dies, he is also rewarded. Most ancient forms of the myth elevate him to divine stature; in fact, all Troezenian brides henceforth cut off a lock of their hair and dedicated it to him. Furthermore, Theseus is commonly condemned

to ostracism, banishment, shame, and grief for his cruelty toward his innocent son. Hence, Friel's ending is not so much an inversion as a realistic interpretation of the idea that both men are destroyed by Phaedra--or by the incident itself or the complex combination of forces and fates that brought it about. The flaws in their relationship as father and son, rather than the intervention of Phaedra, bring about the disaster.

Sometimes a pattern story may be made to yield surprising results, as in the story of Joseph who, when put in prison because of Potiphar's wife's accusations, begins there his prophetic interpretations of dreams which elevate him to power and make him a great man. No happy ending closes Friel's play; no good thing comes out of the tragedy of the Butler family. The downfall is complete. Every member of the family is brought low. Only Anna, Friel's Phaedra, seems to escape. She moves to Los Angeles, effectively distancing herself from the fortunes of a family of which she has never really been a part. In the context of this play, escaping Ballybeg is a triumph, but moving to Los Angeles seems a pyrrhic victory.

Fragmentation

Living Quarters is Friel's most experimental play. He fragments not just a character as in *Philadelphia,* not the narrative as in *Faith Healer,* but the entire action of the play. In the character of Sir he unites the calm, controlled, but commanding voice of the director/stage manager with a fiendish representation

of fate, the gods, or the devil. In Sir's ledger is written "a complete and detailed record of everything that was said and done" on one particular day in the Butler household. The ledger and the character of Sir himself have been conceived "out of some deep psychic necessity" (*LQ* 177). This necessity is the compulsion in the members of the Butler family to "replay" in their minds the events of the day on which their father committed suicide.

The compulsion is not unusual. After traumatic events, particularly the suicide of a loved one, people go over every detail connected with the event in search of some word or act that might have been said or left unsaid, done or left undone, to change the fatal outcome. What is unusual is that in *Living Quarters* the characters act out this replaying with the insertion of comments that reveal their feelings about the events. As if this were not enough to twist the knife in our hearts, Friel inserts a scene in which the family releases its tensions in much the way people do at a wake or following a funeral. Here we see the family as they might have been in "happier" days--if we can believe such days ever existed for the Butlers.

Living Quarters is a complex, disturbing play. In his review of the play, Conor Cruise O'Brien comments:

> Those Brechtian and post-Brechtian devices that were supposed to be liberating from the fetters of traditional dramaturgy are beginning to look suspiciously like fetters themselves. Putting it another way, Sir is a pain in the neck. (Qtd. in Hogan *"Since O'Casey"* 128)

Sir is, indeed, an annoying character, but that is what Friel wrote him to be. He is that frustrating, infuriating voice that reminds us that no matter how many times we replay the past in our minds, it is written in the ledger and cannot be altered. As Omar Khayyám knew, "The Moving Finger writes, and, having writ, / Moves on."[16]

Through fragmenting the action into past and present, into internal and external thoughts, expressed publicly in the action or privately to Sir, Friel reveals the intricate maze of events that brought the Butlers to May 24, the fateful day. This method allows Friel to drop pieces into the puzzle according to his own purposes so that we get the complete picture only when the last piece is in place just before the final curtain. As the pieces fall, the Phaedra plot takes shape, but Friel's fragmentation shows a family situation leading inevitably to a doom in which the Anna/Phaedra character is little more than a pawn in fate's game. As in most of Friel's plays, it is not the details of the action that are important but the constant tension he is able to establish and maintain between what has to be and what should have been.

Like Theseus, Frank Butler is a military man. Richmond Lattimore describes Theseus as "of the old line of heroes, honorable and just but terrible in his just angers" (287), a description that fits Frank Butler well. Frank expresses to his daughter Helen his concern that he has carried over into his relationships with his family "the too rigid military discipline that--that the domestic life must have been bruised, damaged, by the stern attitudes that are

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[16]Edward Fitzgerald, *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (New York: Grosset, 1979) lines 281-82.

necessary over--" (*LQ* 194). Although his stumbling speech reveals his unfamiliarity with this way of thinking, he is attempting to apologize to Helen for mistakes he has made with his wife and children. Despite the apology, he continues to turn a cold, insensitive ear to Ben, even before he learns of the affair.

In his diary on the writing of *Aristocrats,* Friel has included a passage from Norman Mailer:

> If he did something wrong, they [daughters] being women would grow up around the mistake and somehow convert it to knowledge. But his sons! He had the feeling that because they were men, their egos were more fragile--a serious error might hurt them forever. (Qtd. in "Extracts from Diary, 1976-78" 40)

This quotation indicates Friel's thinking on *Living Quarters* as well as *Aristocrats.* Frank Butler's relations with his daughters are amicable. They tolerate his quirks, his unreasonable demands, even his young wife--all with good-natured equanimity. He is especially close to his oldest daughter Helen, 27; Miriam, 25, has less patience with him; Tina, 18, still idolizes him. His relationship with his son Ben, 24, has been strained to the breaking point. Military discipline has only strengthened the natural tendency of an Irish father to be harsh and withholding of affection toward his son. In each father-son relationship in these three plays, an intense need--almost a demand--exists for a connection to be made, for recognition, response, affection to be expressed, because such a connection has been broken or inadequate in the past.

Ben has been close to his mother. Miriam calls him a "spoiled mother's boy" (*LQ* 187). His real break with his father came at his mother's funeral, six years prior to the time of the play. Ben says that after the funeral he was so overcome with a feeling of euphoria that he was afraid he would "burst out singing or cheer or leap in the air" (*LQ* 217). He left the house in pouring rain and walked over sandhills for hours until he could return with a "guilty grief." On the same day, however, he accused his father of murdering his mother, and his father struck him. At the time, he was eighteen, a first-year medical student at University College, Dublin, because his mother wanted him to be a doctor, though his father wanted him to go for a commission in the army. After his mother's death, his health broke, and he dropped out of life and became a bum, living in a caravan among the dunes near Ballybeg. He has recovered his health except for a stammer that affects him when he is tense, but he rarely comes to the house.

When Frank left for the Middle East with his troops only ten days after his marriage to Anna, Ben came around more often. Anna, lost and lonely, trying to remember a man she had been married to such a short while, says she "found [Frank] in Ben," and they had what she refers to as "our attempt at a love affair" (*LQ* 238, 219). For Ben it was more serious, but he admits his motives were ulterior. He has preserved the hostility he felt for his father, has "embalmed it . . . in acts of terrible perfidy . . . smashing back . . . at what you think you remember" and regretting it instantly (*LQ* 212). Everyone in the camp and Ballybeg knows of the affair. Only the

Butlers and army chaplain Father Tom Carty, who is almost a member of the family, remain in the dark.

After a day of festivities honoring the returning hero, after he has been promised a promotion to Lieutenant Colonel and a post in Dublin, after Anna has endured the howling laughter of the men when the Taoiseach called her "the Commandant's comely, composed and curvaceous consort" (*LQ* 234), and in the middle of Frank's reading of a parchment from the citizens of Ballybeg commending him for all his virtues, including being "a father and family man of noblest Christian integrity and rectitude" (*LQ* 237), Anna tells him of the affair. In the reenactment of the events of May 24, Frank makes three appeals before he leaves the room to shoot himself.

He appeals to Father Tom for advice, "What should a man do?" (*LQ* 239). The chaplain in a drunken stupor answers with irrelevancies. Frank then gives an account of his first wife's illness and suffering--as if his own suddenly imposed emotional suffering awakens in him a new sympathy for her physical suffering--even perhaps as if he feels his suffering is punishment inflicted for his treatment of her. This second appeal is not directed toward anyone. It functions as a tentative step in Frank's unconscious groping for understanding. His last appeal, however, is a formal protest that an injustice has been done him. Just when he is about to realize "certain modest ambitions," he says, and attain "certain happinesses, . . . it does seem spiteful that these fulfillments should be snatched away . . . and in a particularly wounding manner" (*LQ* 241).

As in the Phaedra myth, it is the *telling* of the infidelity that brings about the downfall. Although Phaedra and Potiphar's wife have wished to be unfaithful, no adultery has occurred. The scorn they have received for their offer has prompted them to bear false witness. Anna and Ben's "attempt at an affair" is over. Anna could have lived "with [her] secret," Ben could have left, and Frank's life might "have stayed reasonably intact" (*LQ* 207), unless he learned the truth from one of his staff or the Ballybeg citizens, as Anna is convinced he would. She, however, jealous of the attention Frank is receiving, seeing him in a different light as an arrogant and insensitive man rather than the "handsome, courteous, considerate" man she married, and angry that Ben can disappear while she is expected to stay and face the mockery and hidden "sniggers" of the camp and community, resolves to leave Frank. Ben tells her she "can't just walk out, . . . that would kill him--he'd never understand." Anna decides to "make him understand" by telling him the truth (*LQ* 238, 235).

By fragmenting the play, Friel asks us to consider what brought the "very closely knit" and apparently happy Butler family to this point. George O'Brien points out that they are "locked together in memory": "All their talk together is of old times, childhood escapades, the pain of family conformity and the pain of breaking with it, and the inevitable emotional wounds that are endemic to the paradox of the familial" (90). The father-son conflict provides the conduit through which we can discover some of the answers.

Ben has called his father a murderer because he and others believed his mother's illness (probably rheumatoid arthritis) was brought on by the unhealthy climate of Ballybeg. Frank has refused to accept other posts because he was waiting for one that would be worthy of his talents. There appears to be no proof of the climate theory, and by all accounts Frank has nursed his wife faithfully for nearly twenty years, while seeking all the remedies suggested for her--all to no avail. His task was not easy, especially since his wife seems to have been a shrewish, domineering woman--a temperament perhaps aggravated by her suffering.

Louise, the wife and mother, has not only turned Ben into a mother's boy, but has destroyed Helen's marriage. Helen married Gerry Kelly, the Commandant's "batman" or orderly. Her mother had opposed the marriage and had screamed, "You can't marry him, you little vixen! *Noblesse oblige!* D'you hear--*noblesse oblige!*" (*LQ* 183). She had questioned Gerry about his "educational background," his father's "profession," and his "prospects in his chosen career," until he had "cried like a child." She had been so adamant in her opposition that Father Tom refused to stand up to her, even though he is guilt-ridden about not having officiated at Helen's wedding. The marriage lasted a few months. Helen says, "She [Louise] killed him" (*LQ* 215).

Conclusions

The culprits responsible for the downfall of the Butlers are obvious, and they are clearly the ills of society as well. Louise's

aristocratic hauteur, with no sense of responsibility or sympathy toward those of a lower class, lives on in Miriam's disdain for the citizens of Ballybeg. Only Helen shows sensitivity, repeatedly admonishing her father not to mock the Ballybeg people in his reading of the parchment they have presented to him. Frank's false pride in refusing to take a post that is beneath him and his reserved and rigid military demeanor have produced a family that, in his own words, is always "measured, watching, circling one another, peeping out, shying back" (*LQ* 196). Ironically, however, the warm, open, refreshing, and direct nature of Anna which he claims to admire so much has led to the affair and to her determination to tell Frank of it: "Anything she thinks--whatever comes into her head--straight out--it must come straight out--just like that" (*LQ* 196).

Father Tom, whom Sir characterizes as "a cliché, a stereotype" because of his dependence on the family and his excessive drinking, represents the society they feel "slipping away from them" and the failure of religion or the church to be of any help in time of trouble, partly because at that point "they'll be past listening to anybody" (*LQ* 180). The failure of authority figures to respond to the needs of those who depend upon them and to perform responsibly receives the burden of the blame for the failure of this "society." Lack of communication and of maturity on the part of the "subjects," or children, figures in the collapse of the family unit, but the causes for these flaws are clearly traceable to damaging behavior on the part of the authority figures. The "outsider" in the person of Anna serves merely to expose the cracks in the structure

of the family and to shatter the microcosmic society.

Living Quarters is a strong play, but it is not flawless. Friel's technique of fragmenting the action does not always succeed. Details from the ledger--the past--become confused with details from the present, since the action of the past becomes the action of the present in the context of the play. The character of Sir, too, is not consistent. He purports to be only "the ultimate arbiter, the powerful and impartial referee, the final adjudicator" interpreting the "complete and detailed record of everything that was said and done that day" (*LQ* 177-78), but he departs from that role. His departure is particularly noticeable at one crucial point.

Sir interferes when Ben tries to convey his love for his father by reminding Frank of a particular moment in which he felt close to him.[17] The incident occurred when Ben, at the age of twelve, was given a cup of whiskey by mistake and became deathly ill. His family did not know the cause and drove "like the hammers of hell" with him to the hospital. While his father drove with one hand, Ben lay with his head in his father's lap and his father kept stroking his face, cheeks, and forehead with his free hand. While Ben stutteringly tries to remind his father of this event, his father, distracted and inattentive, puts him off. Sir, too, insists that they move offstage to make way for the next episode. Ben is rushed through his attempt to talk to his father, while in the next speech Sir tells Father Tom, "Take your time. . . . We've all the time in the

[17]Compare the incident of the blue boat in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* 94-96.

world" (*LQ* 229). After his father's death, Ben says he was going to tell him that

> ever since I was a child I always loved him and always hated her--he was my hero. And even though it wouldn't have been the truth, it wouldn't have been a lie either. . . . But I suppose it was just as well it wasn't said like that because he could never receive that kind of directness. . . . I just hope he was able to sense an expression of some k-k-k-k-kind of love for him, even if it was only in my perfidy-- (*LQ* 245)

Pine thinks Friel is "almost too concerned with pursuing the relationship of father and son, which is the one consistent 'plot' throughout his work" (136). We have seen the prevalence of this theme in Irish literature and some of the reasons for it. Friel employs the father-son conflict for what it reveals about the difficulty of communicating feelings and the need for this exchange between fathers and sons as well as among all people. He also uses this theme for its metaphorical value, for what it represents of the relationship between England and Ireland or between the oppressor and the oppressed in Northern Ireland and the world.

At the end of *Living Quarters* the Butler family disintegrates. Helen and Tina live in different flats in London and seldom meet. Ben has been jailed twice for drunken and disorderly behavior. Miriam continues her narrow, bigoted life in Ballybeg, where she overprotects her children and is overly dependent on, and excessively demanding of, her husband Charley. Father Tom is living in a nursing home in County Wicklow, where he has difficulty walking and spends most of his time in bed. Anna, in Los Angeles, works for a large insurance company. She shares an apartment with

an English girl, but is thinking of buying a place of her own. She has never returned to Ireland. These bleak, empty lives are a sad end to the vital, relatively happy, if somewhat troubled, early lives of the Butlers. Friel's play sounds a dire warning to society and to the forces of authority.

Comparisons

The three plays in this chapter bear roughly the same relationship to each other as do the plays discussed in Chapter III. The first two in each trio form the groundwork in Friel's treatment of a particular theme. The third is the apex, the culmination, and his final word on the subject. After the third play in each group, he seems satisfied and has not returned to either theme for a major treatment. The third plays, *Faith Healer* and *Aristocrats,* are among Friel's masterworks, his very best plays.

The first plays in each trio, *The Enemy Within* and *Philadelphia,* though effective, are limited in their range of experimentation (in spite of Gar's divided character) and in their engagement of their theme. The second plays, *Crystal and Fox* and *Living Quarters,* represent ambitious variations on the themes and departures into new experimental techniques, but are not entirely satisfactory works. The third plays are closely related textually to the second but are far more successful, partly because they retrieve something of the flavor of the first play in each trio. *Faith Healer,* while following *Crystal and Fox* in its departure into allegory and retaining much of that play's harshness and unrelenting tragic tone,

nevertheless reaches back to *The Enemy Within* for its suggestion of the mystical pagan lure of ancient Ireland and for the religious side of its hero--qualities that mitigate the suffering of its ending while not canceling out its meaning. *Living Quarters* goes beyond *Philadelphia* technically in its highly experimental use of the artificial character Sir to fragment the action. It also expands the father-son theme to include daughters and introduces the context of the family, while at the same time removing the mother--even the surrogate mother-figure, represented by Madge in the earlier play.

Aristocrats is closely related textually to *Living Quarters.* The family grows larger, consisting of four daughters and one son, although one daughter is represented only by a tape recording. Again the children have suffered emotional damage at the hands of an autocratic parent. In this play daughters have suffered as much as the son, and the blame falls more on the father than on the mother. The shadowy mother-figure of the children's memories is closer to Gar's wild, young mother from Bailtefree who cries herself to sleep than to the aristocratic invalid wife of Frank Butler. The mother in *Aristocrats* had been an actress and "a raving beauty by all accounts" (*Aris* 295), wed by Judge O'Donnell five days after he saw her in the lounge of the Railway Hotel, and so unhappy that she becomes emotionally unstable and commits suicide. In *Aristocrats,* however, Friel does not repeat the bleakness that concluded *Living Quarters* but returns instead to the ambivalent tone of *Philadelphia's* conclusion. Although the downfall of Ballybeg Hall is quite as complete as that of Commandant Butler's "living quarters,"

and the on-stage death of Justice O'Donnell is almost as shocking as Frank's suicide, the fortunes of the children, though unpromising enough, have sufficient vagueness about them to leave room for hope.

Aristocrats

The Cultural Context

Aristocrats' setting is in the mid-1970s in one of Ireland's ancestral houses, Ballybeg Hall, the home of District Justice O'Donnell: "a large and decaying house overlooking the village of Ballybeg, County Donegal" (*Aris* 251). A "gaunt Georgian house on top of a hill," the Hall first housed Great-Grandfather O'Donnell, Lord Chief Justice. Next in line was Grandfather O'Donnell, Circuit Court Judge. Its present head, Father, is a simple District Justice. The heir apparent is son Casimir, a "failed solicitor" because he did not complete his legal studies. Eamon, husband of one of the daughters, cynically observes, "if we'd had children and they wanted to be part of the family legal tradition, the only option open to them would have been as criminals" (*Aris* 295).

Friel focuses directly on the corruption and decline of authority, exemplified in the fall of the aristocracy. In this case, it is the Irish Catholic gentry, forestalling any connection being made with the conflict between the Protestant Anglo-Irish aristocracy and the Catholic Gael peasantry. The theme thus becomes universal, observable in the fall of Faulkner's Southern gentlefolk or the decline of Chekhov's Russian aristocrats, for examples. (This is the play most frequently compared with Chekhov.) Reminders of the

great days of Ballybeg Hall are constantly juxtaposed against stark evidence of its collapse.

Throughout the play strains of Chopin's compositions for the piano fill the air, played by the talented youngest daughter Claire, for whose wedding the family has gathered. The days are warm and sunny; the doors of the great Hall are open on what in the son's and daughters' memories are tennis and croquet courts. Ballybeg Hall's significant historical position in the life of the village emerges in the words and actions of Eamon and Willie. Eamon, a villager who has married into the family, is the grandson of a woman who served as maid for fifty-seven years in the Hall when it was at the height of its glory. He says: "Carriages, balls, receptions, weddings, christenings, feasts, deaths, trips to Rome, musical evenings, tennis--that's the mythology I was nurtured on all my life, day after day, year after year--the life of the "quality" (*Aris* 276). He goes on to report his grandmother's reaction when he told her he was marrying Alice O'Donnell of Ballybeg Hall. After a long silence, she said, "May God and his holy mother forgive you, you dirty-mouthed upstart!" (*Aris* 277). Willie Diver, also a villager, but now suitor of the eldest daughter Judith and mainstay of the family still living in the Hall, reveals the marked respect instilled in Ballybeg residents for the house and its inhabitants. After standing on a chair to install the "baby alarm," even though he has protected the chair with his jacket, he carefully wipes the seat with his sleeve.

Evidences of the Hall's decline are everywhere. District Judge O'Donnell now lies in an upstairs room, tended by his daughter

Judith. When the baby-alarm is in place, his voice, a mixture of incoherent mumbling and outbursts of diatribe against imagined citizens in his courtroom, condemns his daughter for "betraying the family," while she struggles to change the pyjamas he has soiled. In addition to the father's decline into senility and incompetence, the character of Uncle George provides another symbol of failing authority. In his late seventies, this brother of the Justice wanders about the house in Panama hat, walking stick, off-white linen suit with "enormous red silk handkerchief spilling out of the breast pocket," and trousers that stop "well above the ankles." He never speaks, but his mouth works constantly, "vigorously masticating imaginary food," and all his movements "are informed with great energy, as if he were involved in some urgent business" (*Aris* 253).

Psychological Scars

The present fortunes of the O'Donnell children point to the sadly diminished state of Ballybeg Hall and the once proud O'Donnell family. Their psychological states show the effects of having been raised by an autocratic father who imposed a restrictive control based on a false conception of propriety that resulted from his isolated position as a member of an Irish Catholic legal dynasty. Eamon, with his customary irony, describes the O'Donnell family as

> a family without passion, without loyalty, without commitments; administering the law for anyone who happened to be in power; . . . isolated from the mere Irish, existing only in its own concept of itself, brushing against reality occasionally by its cultivation of artists; but tough, resilient,

tenacious; and with . . . a *greed* for survival. (*Aris* 294)

All the children carry emotional scars. Casimir, in his thirties, reacts with panic and terror when his father's voice comes over the baby-alarm and is reduced to sobbing contrition when the voice demands he "come to the library at once" and "bring your headmaster's report with you." He was sent to boarding school with the Benedictines at the age of six. At nine his father informed him that, had he been born in Ballybeg instead of the Hall, where "we can absorb you," he would have become the village idiot. He knew then, he says, that he would never have a normal life, never "succeed in life, whatever . . . 'succeed' means" (*Aris* 310). Yet, Friel says, *"he is not a buffoon nor is he 'disturbed.' He is a perfectly normal man with distinctive and perhaps slightly exaggerated mannerisms"* (*Aris* 255). He is the most charming and endearing character in the play.

Claire, in her twenties, has been the most stifled. A precocious and talented pianist, on her sixteenth birthday she was awarded a scholarship to study in Paris. Her father scoffed at the offer, saying he would not have her become "an itinerant musician," and forced her to stay at home where she has become increasingly unstable emotionally . She plans to marry a greengrocer who drives "a great white lorry with an enormous plastic banana on top of the cab" (*Aris* 269). He is a fifty-three-year-old widower with four children and a live-in sister who will continue to manage the house. Alice, also in her thirties and the only sister who has already married, lives with Eamon in a tiny basement flat in London, where

she spends her days drinking and her evenings fighting with her husband. She enters the play with a bruised cheek where Eamon hit her after she threw a book at him.

Anna, the second oldest, has escaped Ballybeg Hall at eighteen to become a nun. As "Sister John Henry," she lives in Kuala, Zambia, and has been home only once in twenty years. The tape she has sent reveals a case of arrested childhood. She speaks like a child, her violin playing is that of a child, and she pictures the family unchanged by time. Judith, the oldest sister, at present chained to the exhausting routine of caring for her invalid father, her erratic uncle, her manic depressive sister, and the dilapidated Hall, has had her brief escape. A political activist, she ran away to take part in the Battle of the Bogside, to join people fighting with police in the streets of Derry. Seven months later she had an illegitimate baby by a Dutch reporter. She plans to retrieve the child, who is now almost eight years old, from the orphanage and raise him after her father dies.

Fragmentation

Friel's fragmentation in *Aristocrats* is subtle. The abrasive character of Sir has been replaced with the somewhat less offensive American professor Tom Hoffnung. He is researching "the life and the life-style of the Roman Catholic big house--the Roman Catholic aristocracy," as opposed to the better-known "Protestant big house with its Anglo-Irish tradition and culture." He proposes to explore

the Catholic aristocracy's "political, cultural and economic influence on both the ascendency ruling class and the native peasant tradition" (*Aris* 281). Eamon claims the Catholic aristocracy has had no influence, wielded no clout, had no cultural effect on the local peasantry. He tells the professor he has a "bogus thesis" and would do better to write a gothic novel called *"Ballybeg Hall--From Supreme Court to Sausage Factory"*--the last a reference to Casimir's present employment in a food-processing factory in Germany. Of course, Eamon is wrong on at least one count; he is the prime example of the influence the big house has had on the local peasantry.

Eamon is antagonistic toward the professor because he fears Hoffnung will "not be equal to [his] task," that all he will see is "the make-believe" (*Aris* 296). The play is a labyrinth of fantasy. The fragmentation, revealed by Hoffnung's search for "truth," consists of the division between fact and "phoney fiction"--that elusive line between reality and illusion.

Casimir carries on make-believe games that have become a family tradition. Sooner or later everyone--except Hoffnung, who does not understand the fantasy--joins in. All the furnishings in the study have taken on the identity of the famous people who supposedly came in contact with them, usually in some accidental fashion. The Gerard Manley Hopkins chair has a stain on the arm where Hopkins knocked over a cup of tea and burned himself while reciting "The Wreck of the *Deutschland"* to Grandmother O'Donnell. The G. K. Chesterton footstool, the Daniel O'Connell *chaise-longue,*

the George Moore candlestick, the Tom Moore ("Byron's friend") book, the Hilaire Belloc Bible ("a wedding present to Mother and Father"), the Yeats cushion--all have similar stories. Yeats sat up three nights on Daniel O'Connell, with his feet on Chesterton and his head on the cushion, because someone told him the house was haunted. Casimir remembers him "vividly": "with those cold eyes burning," saying "You betrayed me, Bernard," and being "quite peeved" because no ghost appeared (*Aris* 267). By the time Hoffnung discovers that Casimir was born two months after Yeats died, it hardly seems to matter, so enmeshed are we in the web of make-believe.

Claire joins the imaginary croquet game Casimir initiates when he believes he has located the holes in the lawn where the hoops and peg stood. When Casimir goes to the phone, Willie Diver takes his place in the game, becomes completely captivated, and boasts that he has won on his first time to play croquet. Friel says, *"His elation is genuine--not part of the make-believe. And his triumph has given him a confidence. He reaches for his jacket and swaggers off the court with great assurance"* (*Aris* 300). This incident provides a clue to Friel's attitude toward the value of illusion. Eamon suggests that Casimir's German wife Helga and her three boys Herbert, Hans, and Heinrich, his dachshund bitch Dietrich, and his job in the sausage factory, are all "phoney fiction." Casimir is never able to reach Helga by telephone, but his account of his life in Germany, if a fiction, is a successful fiction like all the others. Casimir never blunders in his stories. He has obviously retreated into a world of imagination upon discovering that he was

"different," and he now lives within the "smaller, perhaps very confined territories" of his illusions where he will not suffer "exposure to too much hurt" (*Aris* 310).

On the surface, *Aristocrats* is a very funny play. Establishing a division between reality and illusion gives Friel opportunity for a series of comic situations. The comedy serves to hide the pain that naturally results from seeing the decline of a father who now does not recognize any of his children, and from contemplating the prospective marriage of a younger sister to a man old enough to be her father, the alcoholism and failing marriage of another sister, the necessity of abandoning a once-great ancestral house. At the same time, the antics and frivolities of the characters are a poor cover-up for the unhappiness of their lives. Their adversities are enough to drive even the strongest into illusion.

The outsiders Willie Diver and Eamon reveal the impressions they cling to about the judge and life in the "big house." When Judge O'Donnell's voice comes over the baby-alarm, Willie displays deep admiration and respect: "Himself by Jaysus, guldering away! . . . Isn't he a powerful fighting aul' man . . . ? . . . oh be Jaysus he was a sight to behold--oh be Jaysus!" (*Aris* 258). Willie also believes the judge pretended to believe his lies and let him off when he was arrested for driving without tax, license, brakes, and insurance. Eamon is more distressed than the children at the prospects of closing up Ballybeg Hall. Then he admits that everything "fawning and forelock-touching and Paddy and shabby and greasy" in his peasant character needs a house like the Hall to aspire toward (*Aris* 318).

Anna's fiction in far-off Kuala is that the life of Ballybeg Hall will never change. Claire clings to the fiction that she can be happy married to Jerry McLaughlin, the greengrocer. She admits her doubts, but hers is a back-to-the-wall fiction; she has nowhere else to go. Judith appears to be firmly grounded in reality, but she has been living the fiction that hard work is a substitute for life. Hoffnung, apparently the spokesman for reality, suffers from the most serious illusion: that he can understand what life was like in the Catholic big houses if he continues to ask questions, take notes, and "'check', 'recheck', 'double-check', 'cross-check'" (*Aris* 312).

Conclusions

Near the beginning of the final act, Eamon observes, "There are certain things, certain truths, Casimir, that are beyond Tom's kind of scrutiny" (*Aris* 309-10). The final act constitutes a reconciliation of sorts, a coming-to-terms, and a strangely satisfying sifting and settling of the frayed and tattered scraps of lives left to the O'Donnell family. A sense of twilight reverie hangs in the air. Though the bus is about to leave--and Eamon, Alice, and Casimir must catch it to begin their journey back to London, where Casimir will catch the plane to Germany--there is no hurry in their final moments. It is as if time will wait and is standing still for them as they sing their mother's favorite song:

> Oh don't you remember Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt,
> Sweet Alice with hair so brown,
> She wept with delight when you gave her a smile
> And trembled with fear at your frown.

> In the old church yard in the valley, Ben Bolt,
> In a corner obscure and alone
> They have fitted a slab of granite so grey
> And sweet Alice lies under the stone. (*Aris* 325)

They will lock up Ballybeg Hall and leave it forever. Their lives will diverge upon separate unpropitious paths. The future can never be as glorious as the past--nor as painful--yet there is a sweetness about the parting. Friel gives us a family tragedy--but a tragedy crystallized by comedy, muted by memories, and hedged about with hope.

A word about sacrifices. In all three "family plays" the authority figure is sacrificed. In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* S. B. does not die, but Gar presumably leaves for America without breaking through his father's shell to establish any bond between them except the unspoken bond they both sense but cannot express. Thus he sacrifices his relationship with his father to save himself. Like Christy Mahon, he must "kill" the authority of his father to become a man, but like Seamus Heaney he knows his father's ghost will haunt him wherever he goes. He sacrifices the part of himself that wants to remain tied to his father's authority and desirous of his father's recognition and affection, but he trades it for what may prove to be a heavier burden.

The death of their father has already become a heavy burden for the family of *Living Quarters.* The premise of the play, that they have come out of "some deep psychological necessity" to relive the day of Frank Butler's suicide, attests to that fact. The complex

tangle of their lives has brought them to a tragic catastrophe. The tangle has been created by their parents, certainly, but it is tangled because the parents' lives were also knotted with events beyond their control, like Louise's illness, and with personalities at least partly created for them by authority-figures before them. The blame rests now upon the children, and their knowledge of that fact will haunt them for the rest of their lives.

Aristocrats is different. Its distinction rests upon the fact that the son and daughters cling to their illusions while recognizing them for illusions. The strength they draw from their memories, distorted though they may be, enables them to survive and even possibly overcome the psychological damage that has been done to their lives. Upon them rests not the burden of their father's death, but only the burden of his life and the burden of living their own lives with a consciousness that his legacy to them consists of thwarted ambitions and crippled emotions. In the quiet epiphany of their last moments together, they accept the imperfect inheritance bestowed upon them, but are able to receive it with tolerance and forgiveness. The authority figure in their lives has been sacrificed; with him have fallen their family, their home, their past. Yet all these things live on in the illusion of memory.

CHAPTER V
ILLUSIONS AND REALITY: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONFLICT

"*Shane:* Because we give support to his illusion that the place isn't a cemetery. But it is. And he knows it." --*The Gentle Island (37)*

Three of Friel's early plays explore the illusion-reality dichotomy he later so skillfully develops in *Aristocrats.* Although the plays contain much comedy, their common tone of bitter irony provides the rationale for grouping them together in this chapter. Characters are disabused of their illusions, cling to them, or trade one set of illusions for another, while Friel relentlessly exposes Irish illusions to the harsh light of reality.

The first of these plays, *The Loves of Cass McGuire,* followed close on the heels of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* In fact, they played in New York simultaneously for a few weeks in October 1966. Although *Cass,* with Ruth Gordon in the title role, did not enjoy the New York success of Friel's earlier play, it was well received in Dublin, where Siobhán McKenna played Cass. *Lovers,* two plays in one, *Winners* and *Losers,* opened in Dublin in 1967, the same year *Cass* played there. The third play, *The Gentle Island,* premiered in Dublin in 1971. These plays, together with *Crystal and Fox* and *The Mundy Scheme,* the latter of which I discuss in Chapter VI, take Friel from *Philadelphia* to *The Freedom of the City* and fill a period of about seven years. Although all were well received in Ireland and won him a place in the Irish Academy of Letters, Friel seems in

these plays to be searching for a direction. With *The Freedom of the City* he clearly finds that direction and experiences a kind of liberation. Later plays show more maturity and their themes are more fully realized. Still, the plays of this exploratory period are of great interest for the variety of insights they provide not only into the developing playwright but into his responses to the cultural landscape he has chosen for his setting. Even without his later work, these plays establish Friel as an important dramatist.

The last play of this period, *The Gentle Island,* while not the focus of as much critical attention as *The Freedom of the City,* is actually the turning point in Friel's dramatic development. As my chapter epigraphs illustrate, this play contains many of his past and future themes. In it he first comes to terms with the existence of violence in a society and explores its roots. In this play he presents a family as a microcosm of society--a technique we have seen him develop in his family plays in Chapter IV. Manus refers to his family on Inishkeen as a "self-contained community" (*GI* 24). *The Gentle Island* also contains the germs of later father-son conflicts, the illusion-reality conflict fully realized and related to the Irish theme of the blighted land, and a woman as the central character. In addition, in the character of Shane, Friel introduces the outsider as a potential--but rejected--bringer of salvation to the community, a theme we have seen developed in his short story "The Diviner," and in *Faith Healer.*

Seamus Deane sees *The Gentle Island* as pivotal in Friel's career. He calls it "savage . . . , executed in a destructive even

melodramatic spirit" and believes that at this point Friel turned his back on the attitude of "tenderness with which he had portrayed the decaying provincial world of Donegal-Derry in his short stories" and early plays. Stimulated by the situation in which the "society he had known all his life began to break down, publicly and bloodily, in 1968," Friel moved into a new phase of his writing career (Introduction *Plays* 15).

The title *"The Gentle Island"* indicates Friel's ironic purpose. The play explodes the myth of Ireland as a gentle island, an idyllic paradise. Yet Friel continues to recognize the imaginative power such an illusion holds over the Irish consciousness. All the plays of this chapter pit the illusion of Ireland against its bitter reality. Beginning in *Cass McGuire* with a tragicomic ambivalence of tone which almost accepts the need for illusions while condemning the conditions which make them necessary, Friel moves to the bold exposé of *The Gentle Island,* in which illusions are condemned as the seedbed of evil and violence.

The Mythical Context

Both *The Enemy Within* and *Faith Healer* present Ireland as a place of the heart, a land that offers rejuvenation, the essence of life, strength, goodness, fullness, and ripeness. Even though such gifts may paradoxically be accompanied by death, they are preferable to life outside Ireland which is sterile and stultifying. Ireland becomes a metaphor for heaven. Any other part of the world offers only imperfection--limited pleasures, incomplete joy.

Crystal and Fox suggests the connection between Ireland and Eden--a mythical relationship that has a strong hold on the Irish consciousness.

O'Faolain and Foster see the origin of the Eden myth in Ireland's geographical and historical past. O'Faolain says, "Ireland's wealth was for centuries in its soft rains, its vast pasturages, [its] wandering herds" (27). For Foster these images lead to a series of paradoxes. He finds in William Carleton's work a picture of Ireland during and after the famines. Carleton describes a land where too much rain and warmth led to a diseased fertility. In the "sweltering and deluged country" the potato crop rotted in the fields. Paradoxical images of abundance and neglect, fertility and ruin, lead to one of the major thematic motifs in Ulster fiction, that of the blighted land. The decline of the land was blamed alternately on a mocking conspiracy of God, the bad government of the Ascendancy, and the peasants' own inadequacies. The desire to recapture the lost Eden of ancient Ireland thus became linked with religious, political, and economic movements. As we have seen, Ireland also took on the image of a woman; the country became a muse, a goddess. The vitality of this dream was fed by deprivation at home and nostalgia among Irish exiles around the world.

Friel shows how the dream lives on in the illusions of the Irish today. In the later play, *Aristocrats,* Friel seems to view illusions as a sometimes necessary prop to those who have suffered a loss of Eden. Although some of this idea is evident in *Cass McGuire,* his attack on illusions begins in that play and rages mercilessly in

Lovers and *The Gentle Island.*

Friel has recently said in a private conversation: "I have been educated out of my emotions by my intellectual insight. Now I find it necessary to assert an emotional epiphany out of an intellectual and political grid" (qtd. in Pine 21). This idea seems to have been in his mind when he wrote *Aristocrats,* because Eamon speaks of "Plebeian past times. Before we were educated out of our emotions" (*Aris* 288). The result of this return to emotions is a certain "mellowing," a more generous acceptance of human frailty and "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." In these earlier plays, *The Loves of Cass McGuire, Lovers,* and *The Gentle Island,* the tone is rancorous with the bitterness of lost illusions..

The Loves of Cass McGuire

Cass McGuire is a raucous woman in a riotous play. Her roots lie in a short story called "Aunt Maggie, the Strong One," in which Aunt Maggie is dying. Bernard sits with his mother in Saint Joseph's Refuge while a nun and three "old crones" wait for Maggie to "go home to Him." Bernard, detached, recalls her life. She was "the strong one" of the sisters; she cursed, smoked, and lived alone in the old homestead until loneliness was "too big a thing." When she came to the city, they put her in St. Joseph's. Bernard has been charged with persuading her to give up smoking. While he attempts to do this, she tells him of her wild youth when she and his father sang "The Flower of Sweet Strabane" and "Home to Our Mountains," and his mother sat with "a face that would stop a clock." The story

suggests that his father has chosen the "weak sister" instead of Maggie, but that he no longer sings. Bernard's mother knows all the nuns; Maggie could never stand them and called them "damned hypocrites." At the end of the story, after Maggie has died, Bernard feels that knowledge "of all he had witnessed could no longer be contained in the intellect alone but was dissolving already and overflowing into the emotions" (*Saucer).*

In *Cass McGuire* both context and character have been expanded, and while the situation of a young boy encountering an older woman who defies social and religious taboos is retained, the boy's attitude and behavior toward his aunt are greatly altered. Cass is the returned emigrant, having been forced to escape to America at eighteen because of what George O'Brien calls "sexual exuberance" (55). Cass's description, like all her language, is somewhat less delicate. She reports that Father O'Neill "caught Connie Crowley guzzling the hell outa me below the crooked bridge!" (*Cass* 19). For fifty-two years she has been a waitress in a "joint" on New York's Lower East Side, "one block away from Skid Row" (*Cass* 14), and has lived with the owner. After he dies, Cass returns to Ireland and the home of her brother Harry and his wife Alice. She explains, "And when he died, well what d'you do but come home? . . . That's what it's all about isn't it--coming home?" (*Cass* 41).

Living with Harry and Alice are Cass's mother--a former teacher, now deaf, senile, and confined to a wheelchair--and their youngest son Dom, 17, a student. Three older children, Betty, Tom,

and Aidan, have left home to become, respectively, a doctor, a priest, and an architect. Cass's years on the Lower East Side, serving "dead-beats, drags, washouts" (*Cass* 14), have not made her an epitome of culture and refinement. She is a hard-drinking, coarse-talking "gust of skepticism" when she enters the "prudish gentility" of Harry's home (Maxwell *Friel* 71-72). Her brawls in local pubs, her collection of dirty jokes, her uninhibited gutter language: "Honey, I pulled the chain on better-looking things," she says, quoting an American friend talking about Cass's looks (*Cass* 12)--all convince Harry and Alice that she would shock their friends and be a bad influence on their son. We have already learned that their concern for Dom is overdue, and we suspect that their friends deserve a bit of shocking. But, as Cass explains to Dom, his parents have decided, "The less you see of your old Auntie Cass the better, because she ain't got no money, and we suspect she doesn't go to church, and we're not too sure if she's a maiden aunt at all" (*Cass* 11). Consequently, they pack her off to a rest home, ironically called Eden House, and referred to by Cass as a "gawddam workhouse."

Further irony lies in the fact that she does have money--$7,419--because the ten dollars she has sent every month for fifty-two years, plus money for birthdays, anniversaries, and Christmases, has never been used. She has ample resources to pay her board at Eden House and provide her a weekly allowance. Cass keeps wondering why the play is called "*The Loves of Cass McGuire.*" Pertinent here is Carson McCullers' observation in *The*

Ballad of the Sad Café that the love felt and expressed by the lover is the significant factor in a relationship, not the person loved. It is far more preferable to be a lover than a beloved. As Thomas Kilroy observes, "Whatever about fulfillment or non-fulfillment, characters in Friel's plays convince us of their capacity to love. This is what is important even if the love object is a shadow or a lost figure" (8). Cass has a great heart. She has loved the bums of Skid Row, the peg-legged owner of the restaurant with whom she lived, and her "family" back in Ireland.

However, her discovery that her expressions of love for that family throughout her exile have gone unappreciated and unused is a severe blow to her mental and emotional stability. No ties have been established between Cass and her Irish kin. The "home" she has dreamed of returning to is an illusion. Harry's home is a place of shallow pretense, totally lacking in true concern for people and in respect for human dignity. The fact that not one of the children is coming home for Christmas and that all are failures in their lives is further evidence of the false values on which Harry's home has been built. Although Alice keeps up the pretense that all is well, Harry reveals the truth when he tells Cass in the rest home: "You really are better off here" (*Cass* 54).

Unlike Bernard in "Aunt Maggie, the Strong One," Dom has learned nothing. He is shallow, bigoted, and lacking in understanding of the basic human impulses of respect, generosity, and affection. He taunts Cass with questions: "Did you live with Jeff Olsen, the man that owned the place you worked in, Auntie Cass? . . . Were you

ever married to him? . . . Did you sleep with him?" (*Cass* 27). Finally, his eyes "*burning with disgust*," he says, "You're nothing but a dirty, rotten, aul--aul--aul--!" and cannot finish the sentence. (*Cass* 54) Cass has built the illusory Eden of the Irish exile, only to have it destroyed by harsh reality. At Eden house she finds another kind of illusion.

Friel employs two devices of fragmentation in *Cass McGuire.* He fragments the action by scrambling chronology and shifting from one locality to another with ingenious double use of the set. The play begins two weeks before Christmas, immediately after Cass has entered Eden House. It concludes on Christmas Eve. During each act, however, the action shifts abruptly from present to past time, revealing events that have occurred since Cass's return to Ireland--events that explain her consignment to the rest home. The set consists of a "*spacious, high-ceilinged room, somewhere between elegance and austerity, which serves as the Common room in Eden House . . . and also as the living room*" in Harry's house. When the scene is Harry's living room, the back wall is glass, and French windows "*open out to a formal garden where a Cupid statue [illuminated] is frozen in an absurd and impossible contortion*" (*Cass* 5). Cass describes the "workhouse": "We have swank windows, too, opening out onto a garden, only we don't have a nekkid kid holding his hands in front of his rice crispies all day" (*Cass* 10). The presence or absence of the statue, an effect that can be accomplished with lighting, thus defines the scene changes, allowing the play to shift suddenly between past and present.

The second kind of fragmentation is both more subtle and more thematic, relating to the reality-illusion conflict. Characters shift frequently from reality into reverie, reminiscence, and illusion. Two of the "guests" at Eden House are Trilbe Costello and Mr. Ingram, long-time residents. Both depend on make-believe to help them face the cruel realities of their lives. They have invented a past filled with romance, excitement, fulfillment, and happiness, into which they retreat at intervals, reciting its details to the music of Wagner, whom Cass confuses with the former mayor of New York. Sometimes they speak the lines of each other's imagined lover; sometimes Mr. Ingram intersperses lines from the story of Tristan and Isolde. Always they conclude the reverie with Yeats's lines from "He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven":

> But I being poor have only my dreams;
> I have spread my dreams under your feet;
> Tread softly because you tread on my dreams. (*Poems* 73)

Finally they declare their illusions to be "Our truth."

When Cass first enters Eden House she is trying to keep a firm grip on reality. She calls Ingram and Trilbe "real gooks," and insists "they'll not wear Cass McGuire down . . . . I'll ride this gook joint" (*Cass* 28). At the beginning of the play, Cass frequently addresses the audience. Friel says, "*They are her friends, her intimates. The other people on Stage are interlopers*" (*Cass* 9-10). As her life becomes increasingly desolate, and successively more cruel blows shatter her illusions of Ireland as the exile's lost Eden, her grip on reality begins to slip. As she loses touch with reality, she also

loses contact with the audience. At one point she appears confused and, looking toward the audience, asks "Where have all the real people gone?" (*Cass* 22). Later she asks, "Where are you? Jeez, where are you?" (*Cass* 47). Finally, searching the auditorium, she says, "I could ov swore there were folks out there. (*Shrugs.*) What the hell (*Cass* 56). This technique makes the audience a participant in society's failure to answer Cass's needs.

At last, she takes her place in the winged armchair reserved for the recounting of fictitious memories and tells of the life she should have had. Peg-legged Jeff Olsen becomes "tall and straight and manly, with golden hair and kind soft patient eyes." When he marries Cass, her father (who has deserted the family when Cass was sixteen) sings at the wedding, and one of the Skid Row characters plays classical piano. Cass and Jeff move into a ten-room apartment on New York's West Side. Harry's children write her regularly, grow up to be "fine kids," and come to Cork to meet her when she returns to Ireland. Their chauffeured automobiles form a cavalcade to take her to Harry's house for a party celebrating her return. Connie Crowley appears to ask if she remembers their long-ago "romance." She and Jeff buy a place on the beach where Harry's children come to visit. Significantly, however, Cass and Jeff "work and work and don't have no time to think." She concludes by expressing her love for all the people in her life, saying "they love me so much; we're so lucky, so lucky in our love." With Trilbe and Ingram's help Cass quotes Yeats's lines and declares her reminiscence to be "Our truth" (*Cass* 63-65).

In the final scene Friel introduces the newest inmate of Eden House, a Mrs. Butcher, who is bitter and unhappy and says of the others, including Cass, "Lunatics is sane compared with these ones!" (*Cass* 65). Trilbe dismisses Mrs. Butcher as being "still at *that* stage." Cass has happily joined Trilbe and Ingram in their fantasy and is speaking of her husband, General Cornelius Olsen.

Friel has shown, however, that few people in the play have a firm grasp on reality. Alice and Harry cherish the illusion that their lives are successful and their children happy and devoted to them. Tessa, the young girl who works at the rest home, has built a dream world around the man she plans to marry, elevating him from an apprentice bricklayer to a building contractor who will build them a bungalow in the spring. All are doomed to have their illusions shattered as Cass has. Only Cass's mother cannot be disillusioned. In her deafness and senility she can go on teaching Latin roots to her family as she has taught them to her students in her more lucid days, and can continue believing it is summer in December. Friel has introduced her in the opening scene as an effective bit of foreshadowing.

Dantanus believes the play "condones illusion" as the "only possible escape from the painful experience of living" (130). But "condones" is hardly the word for Friel's bitter denunciation of a society that would consign a woman as strong and alive as Cass to an empty life of fictitious memories. As she slips away into the unreality of dreams, the only response we can feel is one of tragic loss. She deserved a better homecoming.

Lovers: Winners and Losers

Friel's next play, *Lovers*, combines comedy and tragedy in a different way and fragments the play into two different dramas which make their point by being juxtaposed. In these two very funny skits, fate seems to play a cruel joke on the main characters. Friel makes his ironic statement by calling the plays (and thereby the protagonists as well) "*Winners*" and "*Losers.*" The discrepancy between each character's illusions and the reality he or she faces provides the basis for strong criticism of Irish culture. The first play draws heavily on Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, but has an Irish slant. The second is Boccaccian in its content and "moral."

Winners

Mag Enright and Joe Brennan, both 17, are the "winners." They are to be married in three weeks time because Mag is pregnant. They have been expelled from their respective schools, the Convent of Mercy and Saint Kevin's, because of their transgressions, but will be allowed to take their final exams. Throughout the two "episodes" of the play, they are studying for their exams on top of Ardnageeha, a hill that overlooks Ballymore. Joe studies some of the time, while Mag talks, from 10 AM until 2 PM, when they leave the hill and head for Lough Gorm to "borrow" a boat and go rowing.

The play demonstrates Friel's early mastery of the technique of fragmenting a narrative into two points of view, allowing two stories to be told simultaneously and details to be interspersed. Two "commentators," a man and a woman, reveal before the end of

the first episode that Joe and Mag have been traced to the edge of the lake, where a boat has been found floating upturned. A search discovers nothing, and they are declared missing. In the second episode, the commentators report that the lake dropped during the dry summer and their bodies were found together, floating face downward. Friel's method emphasizes the unpredictability of life, making us more attentive to the details of Joe and Mag's dialogue by alerting us to the fact that this day is their last.

Though their lives are cut short, they are "winners" because they have experienced the joys of youth and love without living to discover the cruel disappointments that will come to blight their lives and their marriage. Their conversation, though full of hope and plans for the future, reveals what the reality of that future will be. Because of the stratified, inhibiting nature of the society in which they live, they have no choice but to fall into the same stultifying pattern of existence that is reflected in their accounts of their parents' lives. Though the action and dialogue are couched in comedy and jocularity, the play offers symbolic as well as concrete evidence of what their future holds.

Like Oedipus's Thebes under the plague or T. S. Eliot's Waste Land, the society of Ballymore in which Joe and Mag will be forced to live abounds with images of apathy, sterility, disease, death, and disregard for life. As Joe sets out for Ardnageeha, he crosses "the waste ground" where children are throwing stones at rats. He tells Mag of signing the lease for their future home, a flat which overlooks the slaughterhouse yard and is owned by Old Kerrigan, who

slaughters animals by shooting them. Joe has had to sign the lease on the back of a cow that was about to be shot, while Kerrigan stood in a rubber apron dripping with blood, with "cows and sheep and bullocks dropping dead all around him." Joe parodies the scene: "Drive them up there! Another beast. Come on! . . . I haven't all day. And what's bothering you, young Brennan? Steady, there! . . . Bang! Bang! Drag it away! Slit its throat! Slice it open! Skin it!" (*LWL* 17). In jest, Joe and Mag imagine a "holy-cost" in which they shoot everyone they dislike just as Kerrigan is slaughtering animals.

Mag's talk also suggests illness, injury, deformity, and violence. She tells of "vomiting her guts out" with morning sickness and of a man who suffered a sympathetic pregnancy and lay "squealing on the floor like a stuck pig" for the last three days before his wife's baby was born. She imagines the details of an accident when she sees an ambulance; she imagines her baby born prematurely and having to be fed with an eyedropper; she invents stories about an abduction and about a woman who loses her sight, hearing, and teeth, and finally develops "pernicious micropia" with successive pregnancies; and she says, "I'd rather be deaf than dumb; but I'd rather be dumb than blind. And if I had to choose between lung cancer, a coronary, and multiple sclerosis, I'd take the coronary" (*LWL* 26).

The reality of their lives is not much better than the land of horrors suggested by the images in their innocent talk. Joe's father suffers from asthma. For twenty years he has not worked, has received unemployment benefits, and has spent most of his days at

the greyhound track. When there is no racing, he spends hours poring over Joe's old school reports, which he keeps in a trunk under his bed. His wife works from 8 AM until 8 PM, six days a week, as a charwoman. She has centered "all her dreams and love and hope and delight . . . unashamedly in Joe" (*LWL* 24). Mag's father is a not-too-successful dentist who has given up his youthful interest in books, travel, and music, to sit at home after work, drink, and read thrillers. His wife has been under doctor's care for seventeen years, ever since her infant son, Mag's twin, was found dead in his crib, smothered by a pillow.

Joe, who has a real interest in learning, had planned to go to London University for a Bachelor of Science degree and become a teacher. Now he will have to go to work as a clerk for "Skinny Skeehan," whose only concern is that Joe be "a good timekeeper and that [his] writing is legible" (*LWL* 49). At one point he accuses Mag of trapping him into marrying her. Mag, too, regrets no longer being part of the school life at the convent, realizes that she will miss her father from whom she has never been separated even for a night, and admits in a weak moment that she is nervous and terrified.

Friel's tone in this play is much like A. E. Housman's in "To an Athlete Dying Young":

> Smart lad, to slip betimes away
> From fields where glory does not stay
> And early though the laurel grows
> It withers quicker than the rose. (lines 9-12)

Behind the words of both writers lies a silent but vehement outcry

against a world that values the future of its young so little, forgets so soon the promise of youth, and allows the responsibilities and disappointments of age to encroach so quickly, extinguishing the fires of hope, the dreams of happiness, and the visions of accomplishment.

Losers

The second play, *Losers,* is both more comic and more devastating in its vision of the cruel fate life has in store for those who marry. Andy Tracey and Hanna Wilson, the "losers," do not die young. In fact, they do not begin their relationship until both are in their late forties and Hanna, and probably Andy, have had no romantic attachments for over twenty years. Hanna's mother, Mrs. Wilson, is confined to her bed in a room that is supposed to be directly above the kitchen/living room in which Hanna and Andy do their courting. A neighbor, Cissy Cassidy, a *"small, frail wisp of a woman,"* who exudes a *"sickly piousity"* that is *"patently false,"* is a daily visitor (*LWL* 110).

The play consists of a monologue spoken by Andy and interrupted at intervals to portray significant episodes in the four years of his courtship and marriage. In the opening scene, he sits on a kitchen chair in the grimy, sunless backyard, staring through a pair of binoculars at a gray stone wall a few yards in front of him. He explains that he does this regularly because, when he looks through the binoculars, his wife leaves him alone. He learned the "dodge" from his father-in-law who died in the very spot where Andy is

sitting. When his wife found him, she collapsed from shock and took to bed where she has been ever since. The plot develops around two ridiculous situations.

The first concerns the courtship of Andy and Hanna, which takes place on a large black couch in the living room, since they cannot go out because of Hanna's invalid mother. Because of their age, they are stiff and diffident in conversation, but when the courting begins, Hanna takes the initiative and caresses Andy *"with a vigor and concentration that almost embarrass him"* (*LWL* 96). As soon as there is a lull in conversation, however, Hanna's mother in the bedroom above becomes suspicious and rings her huge brass bell to summon her daughter. To forestall this interruption, Hanna insists that Andy recite a poem, while she throws in a few meaningless remarks "to make it sound natural." The only poem he knows is "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" by Thomas Gray, and he knows all thirty-two verses. If he is not interrupted, he can go through all of it without thinking. When they get carried away in their courting and Andy forgets to recite, the bell rings, and Hanna, straightening her clothes and calling her mother an "aul bitch," must go to answer it. The courtship goes on in this manner until Andy learns that all the single men in the furniture factory where he works are going to be sent to Belfast. Hanna and Andy marry hastily and return to Hanna's home for "a couple of weeks" because Andy's house is being painted and Mrs. Wilson has "a bit of a flu." There they have been ever since. Coming back to Hanna's home was Andy's first big mistake.

The second ludicrous situation and Andy's second mistake concern the nightly Rosary in which Mrs. Wilson and Cissy Cassidy insist that Andy and Hanna join them. Mrs. Wilson repeatedly quotes an American priest, whom Andy calls "Father U. S. A. Peyton," who has said, "The family that prays together stays together." Andy recognizes that he and Mrs. Wilson are locked in battle over Hanna. If her mother cannot keep Hanna from marrying him, at least she will keep him from taking Hanna away from her house. Although he recognizes his adversary, she outsmarts him. It is Saint Philomena who brings about his downfall.

Mrs. Wilson has a large statue of Saint Philomena on the chest of drawers and directs all her prayers to her. After Hanna and Andy have married, he declares that he "will say his own mouthful of prayers" downstairs and no longer join in the nightly Rosary. For this act of insubordination, Mrs. Wilson "offered [him] up to Saint Philomena" (*LWL* 128-29). One day a fellow worker shows him a newspaper article declaring Saint Philomena to be a false saint: "Official Vatican sources today announced that the devotion of all Roman Catholics to Saint Philomena must be discontinued at once because there is little or no evidence that such a person ever existed" (*LWL* 130).

Instead of allowing Mrs. Wilson to see the newspaper and discover the article herself, as he later realizes he should have done, in his jubilation Andy gets drunk and comes home very late, "blotto . . . singing and shouting like a madman." He takes up the statue of Saint Philomena and begins waltzing with it, declaring

that he and she have both been "sacked." He says profane and insulting things to Cissy and Mrs. Wilson, all the while quoting lines from Gray's "Elegy." By this caper, he completely alienates his wife who begins sleeping upstairs in her mother's room and treats him with a coldness that is "withering." The three women adopt another saint whose name they keep secret so that Andy cannot "rob them of her."

Andy is certainly a loser. Trapped in a houseful of women, he is doomed to the same cheerless existence his father-in-law knew, doomed to sit in the backyard staring through binoculars at a dirty stone wall until he drops dead. But Friel's title reminds us that Hanna is also a loser. In their courting days, Andy says, Hanna had "spunk" that "gave her face a bit of color and made her eyes dance." It is strange, he continues, "to see a woman that had plenty of spark in her at one time . . . turn before your very eyes into a younger image of her mother" (*LWL* 108). Hanna's one chance at happiness has been spoiled by a conspiracy between her mother, her neighbor, and religion in the person of a female saint. In the battle between Andy and Mrs. Wilson, Hanna's mother has won. As a result, they are all losers. Mrs. Wilson will continue in her hypocritical piety to dominate her daughter and son-in-law until their lives are as barren as her own. Little good can come from religion put to such a use.

The Gentle Island

The characters of *The Gentle Island* loom large like those of Greek tragedy or like Synge's characters in *Riders to the Sea.* They

live in the world of primitive emotions, where dark desires and hidden malevolence drive them to violent acts. This play comes the closest of any of Friel's works to resembling the intense symbolic tragedies of Eugene O'Neill. The setting is an idyllic island off the north coast of Ireland whose name, Inishkeen, means "the gentle island" (*GI* 22). It soon becomes apparent that Inishkeen is anything but gentle. *The Gentle Island* provides Friel's treatment of the theme of the "blighted land."

Manus Sweeney, like his namesake Mad Sweeney of Celtic lore, the king who gave up his kingdom for a life of solitude, is the mad old man of Inishkeen. Like Ephraim Cabot in O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*, he is a Biblical patriarch--a Noah-figure left after the flood with only his two sons, Joe and Philly, and his daughter-in-law Sarah to populate his world. The other inhabitants of this world have deserted Inishkeen. They have sailed away on the flood, crowded into tiny fishing boats bound for Derry where they will separate to go to the Egypts and Babylons of their day, industrialized cities of Scotland and England. Manus, at least, sees their desertion in this light. He has been to England and says he knows:

> Do you know where they're going to? I do. . . .To back rooms in the back streets of London and Manchester and Glasgow. I've lived in them. I know. And that's where they'll die, long before their time--Eamonn and Con and Big Anthony and Nora Dan that never had a coat on her back until this day. And cocky Bosco with his mouth organ--this day week if he's lucky he'll be another Irish Paddy slaving his guts out in a tunnel all day and crawling home to a bothy at night with his hands two sizes and his head throbbing and his arms and legs trembling all night with exhaustion. (*GI* 10).

The exodus has the earmarks of all departures from a homeland where hearts will remain but survival has become difficult if not impossible. The older inhabitants go reluctantly, in fits of frenzied despair and regret. Nora Dan fights the men who try to move her and her box of hens from one boat to another, although in either boat she will be departing Inishkeen for ever. Con, the father of Joe's sweetheart Anna, asks as his daughter prods him toward the boats, "D'you think was the Flight of the Earls anything like this?" He then bursts into drunken song:

> My name is O'Donnell, the name of a king
> And I come from Tirconnell whose beauty I sing. (*GI* 4)

Sarah's father, sent to drown the dog at the last minute, has let the dog escape and almost drowned himself. He departs for the big world with wet shoes in his hand, wet socks sticking out of his pockets, and tears for the daughter he is leaving behind. The young people, after a final night of drinking and mischief, leave with visions of new conquests. Bosco carries his mattress on his back, shouting, "Get the knickers off, all you Glasgow women! The Inishkeen stallions is coming!" (*GI* 2).

If the exiles have illusions about their future, however, they are no more deluded than Manus, the new "King of Inishkeen," or, as Joe says, "King of nothing" (*GI* 9). Manus has refused to leave, even though the decision to depart was made by a vote that supposedly bound the inhabitants to the will of the majority. Like Mad Sweeney, he chooses solitude and loneliness instead of the fret and care of the

world. Like Ephraim Cabot, he is determined to hold on to the land of his ancestors and hand it down to his descendents. On the one hand, this would seem the admirable choice, compared to the desperate flight of the other inhabitants, but hidden complications begin to surface. One problem is that Manus has no grandchildren. His son Philly spends his nights fishing for salmon and lobsters instead of in bed with his wife Sarah. An expert fisherman, he catches one hundred and thirty salmon, not one under five pounds, on the night of the exodus--a sign to Manus that he has made the right choice in staying behind. He speaks of his son as a "prince." Early in the play, however, scattered comments have revealed that Philly's expertise and success do not extend to his relations with Sarah.

In rural Ireland great stress has traditionally been laid upon a couple's ability to produce healthy children. Arensberg and Kimball, in their study of western Ireland in the 1930s, describe the attitude toward marriage and procreation:

> Marriages are for the purpose of producing children and assuring continuity of descent and ownership. . . . They are indissoluble. . . . One proves one's worth sexually in the marriage bed, which is in turn the childbirth bed. The proof of happy adjustment, of masculine virility, and of feminine worth is "the good long family." (200-01)

Pregnancy was a young wife's major duty. If she had children, she satisfied the expectations of the community and was praised. If not, she became a source of shame and might be abused. Her husband, father-in-law, the community, and even her own parents supported this view. Arensberg and Kimball point out that in the unproductive

marriage the husband's virility might be suspect, but blame fell first on the wife.

The action of *The Gentle Island* is set some thirty years later than Arensberg and Kimball's study, probably in the 1960s, as indicated by numerous references to articles salvaged by islanders from planes and ships that were casualties of World War II. Attitudes toward Sarah's childless state are, however, directly in line with Arensberg and Kimball's findings. As her mother departs for Manchester, she tells Sarah she has left the cradle and can be home in a day, "if I'm needed." She draws a pointed parallel between her own early life and Sarah's childless condition:

> When I was your length married I had Josephine talking and Christy crawling and Paddy in the cradle and I was six months gone with you and still that disciple was grinning at me like a sick sheep every time I bent over to put a turf on the fire. Lazy men are a constant burden to their wives. Thank your God you got an active one. (*GI* 7)

Her words belie her concern. In addition to being evidence of a "happy marriage," the producing of children takes on a significance that suggests Biblical times. Sarah herself expresses the criticism she feels in Manus's attitude toward her:

> Philly's the prince. Philly's the apple of your blind eye. And it's easier to blame me, isn't it? I'm the barren one. My womb bears no crop. Like the lower field good seed's wasted on me. The worst mistake your Philly could have made, wasn't it, to marry a sterile woman? (*GI* 61-62)

In *The Gentle Island* the conflict which brings the play's festering problems to a head arrives not in the form of a father's

new wife who becomes romantically involved with a son, but in the innocent guise of two vacationers from Dublin. Peter and Shane reach Inishkeen on the day after the exodus and decide to spend a few days on the island. It seems a paradise to at least one of them, Peter, the older of the two men, who says, "My God, it's heavenly. Look, Shane, everywhere you turn, look at the view; you can see for a hundred miles. . . . And there's not a sound--listen--not a sound. My God, this is heaven" (*GI* 18).

Each character harbors illusions about the island and about himself, only to have these illusions shattered. As in Friel's later play, *Faith Healer,* at least two interpretations of the play are plausible. Each character has at least two selves. Shane, the engineer and the character most in touch with reality, recognizes his duality. When Peter says, "They all like you," Shane asks, "Which of me?" (*GI* 38). Shane recognizes the contradictory nature of the island. He appears to be a clown, a buffoon, constantly mimicking and improvising, so that he never seems to be serious. Yet, like Lear's fool, he possesses the greatest share of wisdom and honesty. His honesty represents the reality of life that is too harsh for the other characters to bear, too shattering to their illusions. From the first he sees evil and violence lurking behind the "divine" natural beauty of Inishkeen. He expresses this recognition in various humorous metaphors. He says Inishkeen is Apache for "scalping island"; he suggests its real name is Hamlin and all the inhabitants have followed a "chap in a strange uniform . . . playing a recorder" through a door that opens into a mountain; and he plays at being "an

old black southern slave" (*GI* 19, 29).

Other less humorous incidents reveal the corrupted innocence of the gentle island. The cottage is furnished with articles scavenged from airplanes that have crashed or ships that have sunk during the war. Manus's favorite chair was flung out of a German plane that exploded. The pilot, still in the seat, was killed without a mark on him. The clock came from a Dutch freighter, the table from a submarine, lamps from a British tanker, and binoculars from a French mine-sweeper. Joe describes the wartime situation:

> My father used to sit up all night waiting for the wreckage. All the men did. And they got bales of rubber and butter and tins of cigarettes and timber and whiskey and what not. Tell them about the night the Norwegian lifeboat floundered below the cliffs, father, when the men were screaming and the-- (*GI* 25)

The implication is that not much effort was made to save the crews of the foundering ships, but much diligence went into collecting the booty. Manus excuses the activities: "They were bad times. We had to live" (*GI* 26).

From ancient times, life on Inishkeen has been colored with violence and thwarted love . According to legend, three off-shore rocks were once two monks and a girl "so beautiful . . . that the fish come up from the sea and the birds down from the trees to watch her walk along the roads" (*GI* 27). Both monks loved her and she couldn't choose between them so she took them off in a curragh one black night. The monk in charge of the monastery was very stern and powerful. He saw them trying to escape and turned them into the

three rocks. Every night the rocks begin creeping toward the mainland where they will be freed from the curse, but daylight comes before they can reach safety and they have to return. The story suggests the dangerous nature of the island--entrapment on it brings death to freedom and love. Its illusory paradise, like a spell or a curse, frustrates attempts to reach reality.

Other stories of pernicious evil are less subtle. On the evening before the exodus, the young men have amused themselves in their drunken revelry by tying two cats together and chasing them to pour hot water on them. The dog Sarah's father has been unable to drown threatens the henhouse. Sarah has been feeding him scraps. Joe suggests that if she fed him regularly he would leave the hens alone, but Manus's solution is to take the pitchfork to him. He succeeds only in wounding the animal, leaving him to drag himself away to die in pain.

The cruelest story is one Manus tells to warn Shane of the type of punishment Inishkeen has traditionally imposed on "robbers." A Negro packman who had apparently stolen five golden sovereigns from an old couple with whom he was staying was harnessed by a long rope to a donkey. Linseed oil was pumped down the donkey's ears, causing him to drag the packman back and forth the length and breadth of the island for a day until the donkey dropped dead. The Negro was deposited on the mainland, fit only to "inch away from them on all fours, sideways like a crab" (*GI* 68).

The play suggests that Peter and Shane are homosexual lovers. Peter abjectly begs Shane for a commitment--some permanence--

while Shane chafes at the restraints of the relationship, wishing to be free, but feeling an obligation to Peter. Peter has taken him from the orphanage where he was sent as a bastard child, financed an education in engineering, and helped him secure a teaching position. The obligation Shane speaks of may be purely financial. The homosexuality, though strongly intimated, is never established as a fact. Shane's sexuality becomes the key question of the play.

Sarah serves as the play's pivotal character. Her dissatisfaction with her husband's "neglect" is clear. She offers herself to Shane in Biblical language, saying "I want to lie with you, Engineer." He refuses on grounds she is married to Philly. On the climactic evening, when Philly has taken Shane out fishing and they have returned late, Sarah claims she sees them naked, engaged in homosexual activity in the boathouse. She says to Manus:

> Would you like to see the bull that's going to sire your grandchildren and bring back life to this graveyard? . . . He's down there in the boathouse with that Dublin tramp, Shane. . . . They're stripped naked. . . . He's doing for the tramp what he couldn't do for me. And . . . if you're the great king of Inishkeen, you'll kill them both. (*GI* 61-62)

When Shane comes in alone and Manus is unable to shoot him, Sarah takes the gun and fires. By this time, he has run from the house. The bullet strikes him in the back, shattering his spine. If he lives, he will never walk again.

The truth of Sarah's report emerges as the crucial question. Has she invented the story out of her anger at Shane's rejection? We know she has been "in quare humour" ever since he refused her,

though she was happy and singing before she asked him. Joe has said, "What's biting her all day? Like a bag of bloody weasels" (*GI* 50). After the rejection, she has slapped Shane viciously when he tried to dance with her. Or has she imagined what she claims she saw? Have her eyes deceived her? We know she has told Shane of an earlier incident when she saw "a wee fat, bald man, with a checked shirt and an ugly, sweaty face" milking the cow in the byre one evening. Even this story is ambiguous because when Philly went to the byre, the man was gone, but the cow had been milked dry. Philly blamed the calf that was also in the byre. Sarah also admits it was dark in the boathouse and she could have made a mistake. Manus says, "It's that dark in yon place you could imagine anything. One night when I went into it there was a sail hanging from the roof and as sure as God I thought it was a sheep making for me" (*GI* 78).

Is Sarah telling the truth? The possibility certainly exists, supported by several "facts": Philly's failure in his marriage; his animosity toward Peter--he admits to bringing the spade down within a quarter inch of Peter's hand time and again when they were cutting turf; and his interest in Shane--he has taken him fishing and on a tour of the island, they have gone swimming, and they have returned home later than expected. Sarah has left the house and could well have gone to the boathouse and witnessed the act she describes. The question never gets answered. As in *Faith Healer,* the truth of each person's words remains a mystery, but at the same time reveals a deeper truth about that person. Sarah's words and actions reveal her need, her loneliness, her feelings of entrapment

on Inishkeen, her unfulfilled and unfulfilling life. She has begged Philly to take her and join the other inhabitants in the exodus. She has referred several times to the days of her youth when she worked for a summer on the Isle of Man and went dancing every night: "I never had a time like it" (*GI* 22). She remains an ambiguous character. After shooting Shane, "All passion is gone. Her mouth is open. Her whole body limp. The gun drops from her hands. Very softly she begins to lament--an almost animal noise" (*GI* 71).

The violence that erupts reveals the evil that lurks behind the illusion of Edenic life on Inishkeen. It also reveals the potential for violence that exists in any person and in any society. Furthermore, it suggests the unhealthy nature of any life built on illusions, any existence that is cut off from contact with society and with reality. Friel suggests the danger inherent in a society turned inward, dwelling on its own problems, allowing old wounds to fester, providing no fresh outlets for its energies, and refusing to let go of its past.

In one possible interpretation of *The Gentle Island,* Shane is the innocent victim of such a society, the Christ-figure, crucified for the possibility of rejuvenation he brings to a blighted land. He is a breath of life; he represents honesty, reality and salvation, but the evil world he comes to save is not ready to accept him. At the end of the play, only Joe has been rescued by Shane's coming. Joe has accompanied Shane and Peter to the hospital in Ballybeg, where Shane is treated and sent on to Dublin, unable to make the trip but sure to die if he remains in Ballybeg. Shane has refused to accuse

Sarah of the shooting, telling the authorities he had tripped going across a ditch. When Joe returns to Inishkeen, he has decided to leave the island. He will not go to London to marry Anna and bring her to live on Inishkeen, thus providing another possibility for continuing the self-contained, introverted society. Instead he will go to Glasgow to join "the Inishkeen stallions" and taste the reality of the outside world. We have already seen the ambiguity in this kind of "salvation."

Manus and Philly also remain double characters. Manus and Sarah give strikingly different accounts of Manus's early life and the loss of his arm. He claims he lost the arm in a mining accident in Butte, Montana. Sarah claims he had both arms when he returned from America: "Two arms and a glib tongue and a roving eye." He got a "gentle young girl called Rosie Dubh" pregnant and ran off to England. Rosie lived with two backward old uncles, who "never spoke and never washed and never lit a fire." They delivered Philly. When Manus returned from England, they were waiting for him with herring knives. In the ensuing fight he lost his arm. He married Rosie, but after Joe was born, she "went for a walk along the cliffs on the east side" and disappeared. Sarah claims Philly knows this "truth," and if he "can't father a family," Manus is the cause. At this point, Manus admits he lost the arm in the fight with the uncles, but claims he had a wedding ring in his pocket, "a couple of pounds to start us off," and a place in London "to bring her and the boy back to." He also believes that Philly knows the whole story and holds

nothing against him.

Philly's claim that his fishing is the only activity that brings in any hard cash is certainly believable. His promise that he will have made £200 by the end of the summer and will take Sarah and "pack up and off and bugger the lot" is less convincing. But if we interpret Philly as simply the hard-working breadwinner and not the impotent, uninterested, or homosexual husband, we add more enigma to the already ambiguous character of his wife.

When Peter talks of Inishkeen in glowing terms: "the sun and the fresh wind from the sea and the sky alive with larks and the smell of heather," Shane's negative comments seem cynical and hollow. When Peter tells Manus he envies him not for the weather but for "the calm, the stability, the self-possession" of Inishkeen, we too are drawn into the illusion and begin to doubt that the evil and violence ever existed. Peter says that on Inishkeen, "Everything has its own good pace. No panics, no feverish gropings. A dependable routine--that's what you have." Then we know that although the potential for evil and violence is ever present in human affairs, the potential for an Eden still exists as well, even if only as a dream in the minds of men and women. This is the ambiguity Friel refuses to settle, refuses to deny, and refuses to erase from his plays.

Conclusions

As Friel moves into his more political phase, in which he acquires what Deane calls "a tone more resonantly that of drama

which has reached a pitch of decisive intensity," he does not lose his remarkable grasp of human nature. He continues to be fascinated with the human need to produce "consoling fictions," recognizing that this need is "rooted in the human being's wish for dignity as well as in his tendency to avoid reality" (Introduction *Plays* 17-18). Man continues to be the "glory, jest, and riddle of the world."[18] While Friel recognizes the danger of illusions and harshly exposes them as potentially disastrous if they are allowed to control our lives and our societies, he also recognizes that the illusions we create reveal our needs.

The image of a mythic Eden represents our need for peace, stability, fulfillment of desires, whatever constitutes our personal ideal of happiness. Peter and Manus see Inishkeen as their idea of paradise, but their images clash with those of others--Shane, Sarah, Philly, and Joe. When one person's illusions clash with those of another, it is time to expose those illusions to the revealing glare of reality. Each character's illusions represent his or her deepest desires and needs. Their inability to recognize their illusions as merely expressions of these needs and to bring these needs to a conscious level where they can be dealt with in a logical fashion leads to the tensions and frustrations that finally erupt in violence.

Joe's decision to leave Inishkeen seems to represent a recognition on his part of his need for freedom from the entrapment of the Inishkeen illusion. Hence, we rejoice in his decision as a kind of salvation, regardless of the unpropitious nature of the immediate future he may face in Glasgow. As Manus, Philly, and even Sarah

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[18]Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man,* Epistle II (1733) line 15.

settle back into their blind lives without recognizing their own or each other's needs, they remain lost. The potential for violence or for insidious evil remains alive on Inishkeen. As Philly resolves to salvage the camping equipment left by Peter and Shane, even though he is unaware of the violence that has taken place, we are reminded of the vulture-like activities of Manus and the men of Inishkeen during the war. The similarity brings home to us the persistent nature of evil. The fact that Manus, Sarah, and Joe have not revealed the true reason for the hasty departure of Peter and Shane leads to Philly's decision, making them guilty partners in his innocent activity.

The Gentle Island stands appropriately between Friel's two most political plays, *The Mundy Scheme* and *The Freedom of the City.* In *The Gentle Island* he has investigated on a private level, in the context of a "self-contained community" or family, the same conflicts he examines on a public level, in the context of the larger community--the city, or the nation--in his political plays. The contexts differ, but the forces operating are the same.

CHAPTER VI
GRAVE DIGGING: THE POLITICAL CONFLICT

"*Shane:* If one admits that there is no absolute truth, would the panel agree that the melodramatic Victorian novelists reveal a concept of reality that does indeed have a kind of bizarre authenticity?" --*The Gentle Island (32)*

The Mundy Scheme (1969), *The Freedom of the City* (1973), and *Volunteers* (1975) represent a new direction for Friel, his entrance into political controversy. These plays are political in the sense that they confront specifically the nature of power and the attempt of those in power to control society. They examine the character and motives of institutions and individuals that exercise that power as well as the condition of those upon whom such control is exercised. Consequently, they must confront also the nature of truth and the ways in which truth is bent to serve the purposes of power. Friel's reality-illusion conflict is resolved in the bitter realization that reality is only an illusion and that truth can be whatever those in power want to make it.

The title of this chapter alludes to Seamus Heaney's use of the word "digging" as the title of the first poem in his first collection, *Death of a Naturalist,* in which he expresses his interest in digging into the past and in giving voice to the silent and oppressed, as he continues to do in his poems on the Bog People. In seeing the Irish bog as a "memory bank" which preserves the Irish past, he is close to Friel's view in *Volunteers.* Heaney, in fact, titles his review of

that play "Digging Deeper." Friel delves into the past to find the causes of Ireland's troubles; he burrows into the mire of political corruption and oppression; and as his characters in *Volunteers* take part in an archaeological excavation, they are in effect digging their own graves. In these plays Friel's digging is serious, or "grave," digging in that what he uncovers involves him in political controversy and leaves him more open to factional criticism than his previous plays have done.

The Mundy Scheme, a satirical look at corruption and incompetence in national government, was rejected by the Abbey, thereby adding Friel's name to an illustrious list of the Abbey's "ungenerous precedents" (Maxwell *Friel* 84). Although it was well received at Dublin's Olympia Theatre, it failed in New York.

The Freedom of the City has received more criticism than any other Friel play, largely because it appears to present the tragic events of Bloody Sunday and to condemn the Widgery tribunal that exonerated British soldiers in the killing of thirteen Civil Rights demonstrators. *The Freedom* opened at the Abbey in February 1973, barely a year later than the inflammatory events of January 30, 1972. Within the next year it was presented in London, Chicago, and New York. In London reviewers were "predictably hostile to its political content" (Dantanus 157). The *Evening Standard* declared it "suffers fatally from [an] overzealous determination to discredit the means and the motives of the English in the present Ulster crisis" (qtd. in Dantanus 157). In New York "it closed before the magazine critics had completed their reviews," even though the newspaper

reviews and its reception in Chicago were generally favorable (Bordinat 87). Deane believes the play's negative reception was due to the fact that "Friel was accused . . . of defending the IRA by his attacks upon the British Army and the whole system of authority which that army was there to defend" (Introduction *Plays* 19).

In *Volunteers* Friel presents characters and issues similar to those of *Freedom,* but removes the action from a scene of violent confrontation, thereby imbuing it with the sense of history that was to characterize his next three plays. The play is thus more subtle and poetic than *The Freedom.* Murray calls it "bitter, but . . . beautiful" (Rev. 171). George O'Brien agrees, adding "surprisingly neglected" (87). Christopher Murray refers to its "inauspicious staging at the Abbey" when it was first performed there, opening on March 5, 1975, but comments that it has been "tightened up considerably" since then (Rev. 171). It has never been produced in New York.

To examine Friel's political plays is to come to the crux of the problem of the writer in a divided society. As we have seen, at the time he was writing these plays, he was arguing for the disengagement of the artist from public affairs. Although *The Mundy Scheme* is pure political satire, the other two plays are not so clear-cut. Both deplore the injustice heaped upon the oppressed by the oppressor but end on a note of bitter resignation. As Nicholas Grene observes, *The Freedom of the City* resembles O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* in that both are counter-revolutionary in their "profound scepticism about the effect and effectiveness of political

liberation. Whatever happens, power remains vested in a system which leaves the people powerless" (67).

All three plays, and *The Gentle Island* as well, grow out of the atmosphere of despair that developed in Derry City in the late 60s and early 70s. Deane observes that from the first marches of 1968 to the murder of the civilian marchers by British paratroopers on Bloody Sunday, "Northern Ireland had entered on the first phase of its long, slow disintegration." The forces released by this breakdown in society had a transforming effect on Friel, Deane believes. He "began to confront what would dominate his writing in the future--the sense of a whole history of failure concentrated into a crisis over a doomed community or group" (Introduction *Plays* 16-17). Yet in the act of writing these plays, and while expressing his despair and frustration, Friel also expresses a measure of affirmation and hope. *The Mundy Scheme* is the first tentative expression of this new temper of what Deane calls a "deeply angry sense of repudiation and disgust" (Introduction *Plays* 16).

The Mundy Scheme

Friel's first political thrust was aimed not at Britain or the Unionists but at the government of the Republic. The direction that government has taken and its failure to create a "strong, secular republic" are part of the reason Ireland is still divided and in conflict. When the British architects of the new Irish state separated the six counties of Ulster from the rest of Ireland in 1922, they never intended the partition to last. It was simply a way

of sidestepping the Protestant minority's hostility to British withdrawal. They believed Britain's strategic interest in the province would evaporate, as it has. They knew both the North and South were often equally hostile to Westminster and equally illiberal on moral issues like abortion and homosexuality. "Time, many believed, would see an inherently absurd partition quickly dismantled." But they underestimated "the ruthlessness with which the Unionists . . . would (with Westminster's shameful connivance) exploit their rigged majority in the north to assert the province's Protestant identity." And they overestimated the attraction of "belonging to the newly independent state."[19]

The narrow sectarianism of the Republic and the failure of attempted reforms have continued to alienate the North. The two main political parties are said to "coexist in a murky world of unprincipled favour-mongering"--a description that coincides with Friel's picture in *The Mundy Scheme*. The dominant party, Fianna Fail, has failed to offer any coherent vision for the future--a failure "epitomized . . . by the wanton destruction over the last 20 years of Georgian Dublin, one of Europe's finest cities" ("Common Name" 16). Friel's play was written more than twenty years before this statement, but he shows his awareness of the government's willingness to allow Ireland's heritage to be destroyed. Milton Levin sees the satire in this play providing Friel with "splendid, splenetic relief" and believes the play was written in "a sustained burst of anger mixed with the writer's delight in having found a marvelous

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[19]"The Common Name of Irishman" 14, 16; I am indebted to this article for many of the ideas in the above paragraph.

metaphor" (135).

The subtitle "May We Write Your Epitaph Now, Mr. Emmet?" is a reference to the speech given on the eve of his execution in 1803 by Robert Emmet, leader of an abortive rebellion against English rule in Ireland. Emmet's career in political activism began with his expulsion from Trinity College for a debating society speech in which he said: "When a people advancing rapidly in knowledge and power perceive at last how far their government is lagging behind them, what then, I ask, is to be done in such a case? What but to pull the government up to the people?" (qtd. in McCarthy 1086). This question takes on ironic significance in the events of Friel's play, as do the details of Emmet's life.

Having joined the United Irishmen in 1798, Emmet went to France, where he became "the confidant of the Jacobins" and "the center of a select circle of exiles . . . both Irish patriots and French republicans." He returned with promised assistance from France and, using his inheritance of $7500, began to stockpile "pikes, rockets, and hand grenades" in a house in Patrick Street, Dublin. On July 23, 1803, the day set for his rebellion, only about one hundred insurgents turned out, but they were soon joined by a noisy rabble, who, on their way to attack the Castle, killed three people--a Colonel Brown, a Rev. Mr. Wolfe, and the Lord Chief Justice of Ireland, Kilwarden. Emmet rushed to save Kilwarden's daughter, transported her to safety, and, in utter disgust at not being able to control the mob, fled to the Wicklow Hills. He was captured because he refused to flee the country until he had seen his betrothed.

Emmet is a perfect example of the romantic idealism, accompanied by utter disregard or ineptitude when faced with practical matters, that has characterized many of Ireland's attempts at achieving self-rule. His words stand as a fitting introduction to a play satirizing the incompetence of the government of the Republic. His integrity, however, contrasts sharply with the corruption Friel exposes in the country's leaders.

In his final speech, Emmet eloquently defends himself against the charge of selling his country to France. He cites the example of George Washington, claiming he wished to "procure the guarantee which Washington had procured for America" and deliver his country from "the yoke of a foreign and unrelenting tyranny, and the more galling yoke of a domestic faction, which is its joint partner and perpetrator in the patricide" (McCarthy 1090). The reference of Friel's subtitle is to Emmet's final statement before going to his death: "When my country takes her place among the nations of the earth, *then*, and *not till then*, let my epitaph be written (McCarthy 1093).

Friel's play is his ironic comment on the fact that Ireland is now taking her place among the nations of the earth, and that this accomplishment is not the glorious apogee she had envisioned but instead reveals all the pettiness and weakness of the country. The play begins with an anonymous voice asking:

> What happens when a small nation that has been manipulated and abused by a huge colonial power for hundreds of years wrests its freedom by blood and anguish? . . . Does the transition from dependence to independence induce a fatigue, a

> mediocrity, an ennui? Or does the clean spirit of idealism that fired the people to freedom augment itself, grow bolder, more revolutionary, more generous? (*MS* 7)

In a mock heroic tone the voice describes the history of Ireland, declaring that after the confusion and squabbling that followed independence, the people "realized they had better put their little green isle in order" and set to work "with a new vigour" (*MS* 8). The play professes to show the results of their labor.

The Mundy Scheme shows the Taoiseach (the Irish equivalent of prime minister) F. X. Ryan, a former auctioneer, faced with the near bankruptcy of the country. He has moved his office to his home because he is suffering from labyrinthitis, which manifests itself in sudden bouts of dizziness and nausea. He can thus be close to his mother with whom he lives. He has refused aid from the United States in exchange for permission to harbor nuclear submarines in Cork and Galway because he wants to avoid being involved in the East-West power struggle. His minister for commerce insists "we're going to have no dirty Yankee sailors with nuclear warheads seducing decent Galway girls and decent Cork girls" (*MS* 34). Of course the ports are too small for nuclear subs anyway.

Salvation comes in the form of the Mundy Scheme, the "marvelous metaphor" of which Levin speaks. Wealthy Texan Irish-American Homer Mundy proposes turning the barren, depopulated, but beautiful, land of the West of Ireland into an international cemetery: "France is the . . . home of good food; America . . . the centre of art; Switzerland . . . the centre of Europe's banking" (*MS* 29). Ireland

will be the acknowledged final resting place, thus saving precious land around New York, Paris, and other cities. Money will pour into Ireland through land purchase, burial services, grave upkeep, and "tourism," as people come to visit their departed relatives.

The scheme meets with token opposition, "since what is being contemplated is a totally opportunistic subletting of that part of the country enshrined in Ireland's modern cultural mythology as the homeland of the native" (George O'Brien 69). The minister of finance argues, "We are addicted to death as it is. . . . You will end up with a nation of chronic necrophiliacs" (*MS* 36). When the cabinet members realize they will benefit personally from the scheme, however, their scruples evaporate. While plans are being implemented, the Taoiseach and his cronies maneuver secretly to buy up as much land as possible. Meanwhile, they are busy blackmailing each other. Ryan outwits them all, but in the final scene tells his "mummy" that he has been "naughty" (*MS* 74).

The play contains brilliant satire with the kind of flat characters necessary to "lampoon types of political behavior" (Maxwell *Friel* 87). George O'Brien calls it one of Friel's "most verbally exuberant works, taking particular relish in exposing the typically duplicitous quality of politicians' speech" (70). Critics agree, however, that the central plot is little more than a cartoon or an anecdote and is insufficient to carry a full-length play, although as a stroke of satire it is "worthy of comparison with Swift's modest proposal" (Levin 136). As Friel's first venture into the political arena, it is a significant step in his development. In his

next political venture he leaves satire behind and returns to his effective tragicomedy.

The Freedom of the City

The political situation in Derry City had been deteriorating all of Friel's life, but especially since 1968. In the summer of 1971, six months before Bloody Sunday--the event which gave him a focus for the play he was trying to write on poverty,[20] marches had been banned under the Special Powers Act of 1922. At 4 AM on August 9, under the authority of this same act, "British soldiers made sweeping arrests of suspected IRA terrorists or Republican activists." Hundreds of men were "interned in concentration camps without being charged with or tried for any criminal offense" (Dash 15). They were denied representation by council and denied the writ of habeas corpus, a cornerstone of British law since the Magna Carta. The march in the Bogside--Derry's Catholic ghetto--was planned for January 30, 1972, by NICRA (the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association) as a protest against the internment and the failure of the Stormont government to release the internees or to try them for specific offenses.

An increasingly hostile situation developed in the Bogside area and the Creggan district (also Catholic) in the fall and winter of 1971. These two areas have a population of 33,000 out of a total population of 55,000 for the entire city of Derry (Widgery 4). The 8th Infantry Brigade, within whose area of command the city lay,

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[20]Eavan Boland, "Brian Friel: Derry's Playwright," *Hibernia,* 16 Feb. 1973, 18, qtd. in Winkler "Reflections" 412.

had increasing difficulty patrolling the area and maintained posts only around the edges of Bogside and Creggan. As "the IRA tightened its grip on the district," sniping and bombing became common, and unemployed youths gathered daily to throw "stones and other missiles," including "nail and petrol bombs," at British troops (Widgery 5). Troops did not patrol the area during the day because of the danger. Arson and bombing attacks had been directed at shops and businesses on the fringe of the Bogside, and authorities feared the violence would spread.

When NICRA announced plans for the march, the army faced a dilemma. If the march was allowed to take place without opposition, they feared the law would fall into "disrepute" and they would have trouble controlling future marches. On the other hand, to attempt to stop by force a crowd that might number as many as 25,000 could result in heavy casualties or the "overrunning of the troops by sheer weight of numbers" (Widgery 6).

It was decided to allow the march to start but to contain it in the Bogside area rather than permit it to continue to the Guildhall as the leaders had planned. Barricades were erected accordingly, and a "scoop up" operation was ordered to arrest as many "hooligans" and rioters as possible. This operation was assigned to the 1st Battalion Parachute Regiment. The local police chief advised against this plan, recommending that nothing be done to hinder the march. Believing that the march would be peaceful, he suggested photographing any marchers who caused a disturbance and arresting them later. His recommendation was rejected by General Ford, the

Commander of Land Forces in Northern Ireland, by Stormont, and by Westminster. This brings us to January 30.

> The marchers assembled on the Creggan Estate on a fine sunny afternoon and in carnival mood. . . . [They] included many women and some children, [and] were orderly and in the main good humored. (*Lord Widgery's Report* 8-9)

> On the bright, sunny Sunday afternoon of January 30, 1972, British paratroopers, using high velocity, self-loading rifles, fired at a number of civilians in the Bogside area of Londonderry killing 13 of them and wounding another 13. (Samuel Dash, *Justice Denied: A Challenge to Lord Widgery's Report* 13)

Both of these reports on Bloody Sunday remark on the good weather. Perhaps sunshine is unusual in Derry in January, or perhaps people are especially conscious of the weather on the day of a march. The irony, however, is inescapable. The marchers were in a "carnival mood." It probably never occurred to them that the day would end in bloodshed.

After the violence subsided, reports of what had happened and why it had happened were so conflicting that the British government felt compelled to set up a judicial tribunal of inquiry to make a full investigation. The tribunal was headed by Lord Chief Justice Widgery (with his strange surname, so suggestive of inquisitions and medieval machinations). The tribunal was convened in February, conducted its investigation for twenty days, and published its findings, thereafter known as the Widgery Report, on April 19, 1972. At the same time, the International League for the Rights of Man, a private organization having consultative status with the United

Nations, also went to Derry, observed the investigations of the Widgery Tribunal, and urged families of the dead and wounded to testify. Professor Samuel Dash, Director of the Institute of Criminal Law and Procedure of Georgetown University Law Center, served as consultant to the International League and prepared a report based on his analysis of the twenty volumes comprising the record of the official inquiry and hundreds of statements of eyewitnesses.[21] This report was published in June 7, 1972, under the title *Justice Denied: A Challenge to Lord Widgery's Report on "Bloody Sunday."*

Even without the second report, however, Lord Widgery's Report appears a whitewash. It angered many Irish people who had until then retained some faith in British justice. Friel uses direct quotations and specific details from the Widgery Report and demonstrates in the context of his play how an investigation may appear truthful and yet be greatly at odds with the reality it investigates. He also shows how various other communications advanced as "accurate" fall short of reflecting the truth of the situation. The lives of the three central characters are different from any picture painted by the commentators, even by the sociologist, whose findings we generally accept. We have already seen Friel's statements, made in earlier and later plays, on the clash between reality and illusion. In the context of this play, however,

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[21]Samuel Dash is also the author of *Chief Counsel: Inside the Ervin Committee--The Untold Story of Watergate* (New York: Random House, 1976), an account of his experiences as chief counsel for the Senate committee appointed to investigate Watergate.

truth becomes a matter of public concern because not only individual lives but the fate of an entire society depends upon it.

The Freedom of the City conveys a dominant impression of incongruity. The guilelessness and naïveté of the three victims are totally discordant with the various expressions of pomposity, superciliousness, overreaction, melodramatics, callousness, and dishonesty of the other figures in their world. Friel has encased the marchers, Lily, Skinner, and Michael, in a cocoon. They are caught in the Mayor's parlour of Derry's Guildhall, "the municipal nerve center of Londonderry" (*FC* 149), into which they have inadvertently stumbled to escape the British army's CS gas and water-cannon attack.

They are, of course, out-of-place in the grandiose atmosphere of the Guildhall. Its oak-panelled walls and plush carpets, its luxurious furnishings with leather desktops and brass doorknobs, its washroom with pink and black tile and gold taps in the shape of fishes' heads, at first overwhelm them, then excite, incite, and finally anger and alienate them. So foreign is this display of wealth that Lily, 43, a mother of eleven children who works as a cleaning woman because her husband is an invalid, insists that she would cover the oak walls with a "nice pink gloss paint that you could wash the dirt off," put "decent glass you could see through" in the stained-glass windows, and replace the painting of Sir Joshua Hetherington with "a nice flight of them brass ducks" (*FC* 121).

As alien as these surroundings are, they effectively insulate the three from the activities going on in the city--an indication of

how insulated the government of Derry is from the city itself. Enshrouded in their comfortable womb, the three demonstrators do not realize that to the city outside they have become forty, fifty, even a hundred, armed terrorists whose possession of the Guildhall makes them an acute embarrassment to the security forces and the Stormont government, and instant heroes to the Bogside, where people are already celebrating "the fall of the Bastille" (*FC* 118). Their ignorance of these developments makes them entirely unprepared for the fact that when they emerge from the Guildhall, unarmed, with their hands above their heads exactly as ordered, they are blown to bits by the combined army and police force that has surrounded the building:

> The 8th Infantry Brigade, 1st Battalion Parachute Regiment, 1st Battalion King's Own Border Regiment, two companies of the 3rd Battalion Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. . . . The Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment. . . . Twelve Saracens, ten Saladins, two dozen Ferrets and four water-cannons, and a modicum of air cover. (*FC* 133)

The regiments Friel lists are identical with those listed in Lord Widgery's report (6, 7). The motorized force varies somewhat. Water-cannon and Ferret scout cars were present and army helicopters took photographs, but Friel's inclusion of tanks is an anachronism. Tanks were not brought into Northern Ireland until Operation Motorman in July 1972. The vehicles involved were seven armored personnel carriers or APCs, known to the army as "Pigs," and two "soft-skinned 4-ton lorries" (Widgery 15).

This tremendous marshalling of force against three civilians prompts the judge in *Freedom* to comment, "I'm an old army man myself, . . . and it does seem a rather formidable array to line up against three terrorists, however well armed they could have been" (*FC* 134). Lord Widgery's report makes no comment, not even an ironic one, on the obvious inequality of the opposing groups. Although Friel has exaggerated the odds a bit, the fact remains that a large force of well-trained British troops was sent into a generally peaceful civilian demonstration. This is not the first or last time that the use of a trained military force to control civil protest has resulted in the deaths of innocent people.

Lord Widgery reports that the paratroop regiment was brought in to conduct an arrest operation against "hooligans." Although cross-examination suggested that the paratroopers had the reputation for being the "roughest and toughest unit in Northern Ireland" and that the army intended to use them "to flush out any IRA gunmen in the Bogside and destroy them . . . or to send a punitive force into the Bogside to give the residents a rough handling and discourage them from . . . further attacks on the troops," all the officers questioned denied this assertion (Widgery 8). Lord Widgery admits, however, that paratroopers "are trained to go for the gunman and make their decisions quickly. In these circumstances it is not remarkable that mistakes were made and some innocent civilians hit" (Widgery 36).

The massive array of military strength marshalled against the three Civil Rights marchers in Friel's play reminds Grene of

Fluther's protest in *The Plough and the Stars* when the British sergeant complains that the Irish rebels won't "foight fair":

> Fight fair! A few hundhred scrawls o' chaps with a couple o' guns an' Rosary beads, again' a hundhred thousand thrained men with horse, fut, an' artillery . . . an' he wants us to fight fair! D'ye want us to come out in our skins an' throw stones? (O'Casey 213, Grene 63)

Friel's equivalent image is that of "wee Johnny Duffy," the little deaf window-cleaner. Lily describes having just told Duffy that the speakers at the march are saying, "The streets is ours and nobody's going to move us," when she turns around to discover a "big Saracen" tank right behind them. As she runs away, she looks back to see wee Johnny waving his fist at the tank and shouting, "The streets is ours and nobody's going to move us!" (*FC* 114).

Friel has said *The Freedom of the City* is about poverty, not Bloody Sunday. Probably to avoid direct reference to that event, he has set the time of the play as February 10, 1970, an equally significant time in Derry's history. The winter of 1969-70 saw the first violent disruption of Civil Rights marches and the emergence of the Provisional IRA. Grene sees in the two central male characters--Michael, 22, and Skinner, 21--a reflection of this historical winter. Michael "represents habits of mind characteristic of the Civil Rights movement and in his death suggests their inadequacy." Skinner, "a potential Provo in the making," thinks, as he faces death from the British soldiers, "how seriously they took us and how unpardonably casual we were about them; and that to

match their seriousness would demand a total dedication, a solemnity as formal as theirs" (*FC* 150, Grene 65-66). Such total dedication was to come from the Provisionals. Yet, does Skinner's death suggest their inadequacy, too?

Friel gives to Skinner, who is the "wise fool" of this play like Shane in *The Gentle Island* and Keeney in *Volunteers,* the speech that might express the ideological thrust of the play. He defines for Lily, who at first seems not to have the foggiest notion of why she has taken part in the march, her reasons for protesting:

> Because you live with eleven kids and a sick husband in two rooms that aren't fit for animals. Because you exist on a state subsistence that's about enough to keep you alive but too small to fire your guts. Because you know your children are caught in the same morass. Because for the first time in your life you grumbled and someone else grumbled and someone else, and you heard each other, and became aware that there were hundreds, thousands, millions of us all over the world, and in a vague groping way, you were outraged. That's what it's all about, Lily. . . . It's about us--the poor--the majority--stirring in our sleep. (*FC* 154)

Friel seems to undercut the strength of this speech by having Lily then confess her real reason for marching. She marches for Declan, her mongoloid child, even though she knows the marching cannot help him.

In Grene's opinion, "What is suggested here is that there is a level of human pain and need which no political panacea can satisfy, suffering that no change of government could allay" (66). Bordinat seems to translate Lily's protest into a complaint against poor medical care (90). Neither interpretation fits Friel's tone. On one

level of meaning, Declan represents the outcasts of the world--those who are outcasts from society through no fault of their own, simply though an accident of birth. Although Lily's marching cannot save Declan, and better medical care may not remedy mongolism, someday genetic research will. Thus, rather than offsetting Skinner's speech, Lily's reason for marching may actually support it. Whatever "solution" for society's ills one may find in this play, Friel's complaint is clear. The play was written out of anger, "double anger at the suffering of an oppressed minority and at the hypocrisy of their oppressors" (Grene 63).

When the play opens, the three marchers *"lie grotesquely across the front of the stage . . . which is lit in cold blue."* A photographer, *"crouching for fear of being shot,"* photographs the bodies. A priest, *"holding a white handkerchief above his head,"* administers last rites (*FC* 107). Friel's fragmentation of the action begins in the midst of this scene as a spotlight picks out a judge and the investigation begins. Throughout the play, while Friel takes us to the Guildhall where Lily, Skinner, and Michael reveal the details of their lives, the action is interrupted to allow police and army officers, a forensic expert, a pathologist, a news commentator, an American sociologist, a priest, and a balladeer to provide different perspectives on the deaths of the three marchers.

Friel's technique borrows from Brecht's epic theatre. The play is composed of a series of scenes. It moves abruptly from scenes in which the role of the audience is the traditional one of onlookers, to scenes in which the audience is "forcibly incorporated into the play"

(Birker 154). Birker observes that the division into traditional and non-traditional scenes follows generally the division into scenes that take place before the deaths of the three marchers and those that take place afterward.

Classical drama makes a definite distinction between the stage and the auditorium and thus emphasizes the fictional nature of events that occur on the stage. Modern drama, including epic theatre, reduces that distinction by making the audience part of the action on stage, creating a sense of reality. As we have seen, in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* Friel has followed this distinction carefully. As Cass retreats into illusion, she loses contact with the audience, who represent reality.

In *The Freedom of the City,* however, Friel has followed the distinction between reality and illusion only on one level of meaning. On another level he has reversed the order. Since we know the three marchers are dead at the beginning of the play (another device from epic theatre), the scenes in which they are alive are, of course, a fiction or an illusion. The scenes following their death, in which we are invited to react to the various assessments of their lives and the reasons for their deaths, are acceptable as reality.

The scenes involving Lily, Skinner, and Michael, however, which we supposedly view as illusion, are, as we have already seen, the scenes that give us the truth. The scenes involving other speakers who are not characters but only "social roles," while purportedly representing reality, actually expose the falsity of society's views. In these scenes the audience is essentially

powerless. We can react and judge, but we cannot change the outcome. Thus we experience the powerlessness of the three protagonists.

In addition, the scenes involving the three marchers, except for those in which they emerge from the protection of the Guildhall to face their death, are the comic, "safe" scenes in which we can relax and experience their temporary enjoyment of what it is like to be rich and privileged. The other scenes are tragic. We suffer the reality of their deaths and become a party to the fictionalizing of their lives by people who did not know them. Friel has again taken the techniques of drama and inverted them to suit his purposes, creating what is arguably his strongest play.

Friel creates further sympathy for Lily, Skinner, and Michael by showing them as round characters--flawed individuals, but basically honest, well-meaning people who deserve better lives and do not deserve to die. Skinner is the cynic, the anti-authoritarian, out of work, with no professional training and no fixed address. He has been in trouble with the police for petty larceny and disorderly behavior. Yet he is the most intelligent and has the most "savvy" of the three. It is he who discovers that they are in the Mayor's parlor and knows instantly that they will pay for their presumptuousness, but even he does not know they will pay with their lives. He tells Michael he will be arrested, "Because you presumed, boy. Because this is theirs, boy, and your very presence here is a sacrilege" (*FC* 140). Skinner is the typical Friel character whose wit and antics provide marvelous comic entertainment--all the more so because

the audience realizes that his comedy covers an intelligence that perceives too clearly the dark tragedy of the world.

Michael is Skinner's antithesis. Sincere, trusting, ambitious, optimistic, and idealistic, he looks back fondly on the early days of "disciplined," "dignified" marches. He believes to the very end:

> We made a peaceful protest and they know that. They're not interested in people like us. It's the troublemakers they're after. . . . And if they ask you a straight question, give them a straight answer, and I promise you there'll be no trouble. (*FC* 158)

His innocence is peculiarly touching, especially when we already know how mistaken he is. Lily "mothers" them both.

Skinner makes free with the liquor cabinet, the telephone, and the cigars--one of which he extinguishes in the leather desktop. As a parting gesture, he drives the ceremonial sword through the portrait of Sir Joshua. Lily at first disapproves, then joins him in the port wine, which she says is "gorgeous." She becomes slightly tipsy and dances around in one of the ceremonial robes singing "Lily of Laguna," and saying, "Mother of God, if the wanes [her children] could see me now!" (*FC* 136). Michael insists Lily and Skinner are the kind that give the marches a bad name.

Yet even he is persuaded to join Lily and Skinner when they don the mayoral robes. Wearing the heavy elegant robe, Lily says she feels as if she "could give benediction" (*FC* 136). In full regalia, ceremonial hat and all, Skinner confers on the others "the freedom of the city." Friel shows that the people of the Bogside, even those who lost their lives on Bloody Sunday, are not statistics, anonymous

trouble makers, hooligans, nor terrorists, but ordinary human beings who have never enjoyed the freedom of the city. Michael, Lily, and Skinner, who enjoy it briefly in their charade, are deprived of even their illusions.

Friel allows each victim to describe his or her own dying. True to his ideals, Michael refuses to believe he will be shot even when he hears the click of the rifle-bolts. After he is shot, he says:

> And I became very agitated, not because I was dying, but that this terrible mistake be recognized and acknowledged. My mouth kept trying to form the word mistake--mistake--mistake. And that is how I died--in disbelief, in astonishment, in shock. It was a foolish way for a man to die. (*FC* 149-50)

We have seen Skinner's comment on the seriousness of those on top compared to the casualness of those on the bottom. His last thought was: "if you're going to decide to take them on, Adrian Casimir, you've got to mend your ways. So I died, as I lived, in defensive flippancy" (*FC* 150).

Lily's dying thoughts directly refute the comments of the sociologist, whose urbane, dispassionate remarks have provided a further dimension in the erroneous views of society. The irony in his analysis of the way of life of people in "the sub-culture of poverty . . . at the very bottom of the socio-economic scale" (*FC* 110) is sometimes missed by critics and audiences. One of his observations is that the poor are "present-time oriented." Emphasizing that he does not want to "idealize or romanticize the culture of poverty," he nevertheless sees this characteristic as a

positive aspect:

> Present-oriented living . . . may sharpen one's aptitude for spontaneity and for excitement, for the appreciation of the sensual, for the indulgence of impulse, . . . aptitudes . . . often blunted or muted in people . . . who are middle-class and future-oriented. . . . People with a culture of poverty . . . often have a hell of a lot more fun than we have. (*FC* 135)

Lily's words and the entire action of the play show the hollowness and blindness of this attitude. Lily says that "in a way" she "died of grief." She feels a "tidal wave of regret . . . that life had somehow eluded [her] . . . because never once . . . had an experience, an event, even a small unimportant happening been isolated, and assessed, and articulated" (*FC* 150). The present-time orientation of the poor does not allow time for such reflection.

After their deaths the three are "changed utterly" by the various voices of society. To the balladeer, they have given their lives for "Mother Ireland--one and free," and have joined the ranks of "Tone, Pearce, and Connolly" (*FC* 148, 118). To the priest, their deaths offer an opportunity for a moral exemplum both for and against revolution--an inspiration to "stiffen our resolution, . . . to see that the dream they dreamed is realized," but also to resist the forces that would "deliver this Christian country into the dark dungeons of Godless communism" (*FC* 125, 156). For the television reporter their funeral is an occasion for grandiloquent rhetoric: "one wonders will this enormous grief ever pass, so deeply has it furrowed the mind of this ancient, noble, suffering city of St Colmcille" (*FC* 167).

The funeral is "concelebrated" by the four Northern bishops; the Cardinal Primate has flown in from Rome; "spiritual leaders of every order and community in the country are present." Colonel Foley represents the President. The Taoiseach, bare-headed, gently refuses an umbrella; all the members of the Dáil and the Senate attend. Yet the judge has already decided the three trouble-makers are guilty of conspiracy.

Using Lord Widgery's exact words (my italics), the judge announces:

> This tribunal of inquiry . . . is in no sense a court of justice. Our only function is to form an *objective view of the events* which occurred . . . It is *essentially a fact-finding exercise;* and . . . it must be understood that it is none of our function to *make moral judgements.* (*FC* 109-10)

He then shows that he has already passed judgment on them: "Our only concern is with that period of time when these three people came together, seized possession of a civic building, and openly defied the security forces" (*FC* 109). He says the facts may indicate that they "were callous terrorists who had planned to seize the Guildhall weeks before" or "that the misguided scheme occurred to them on that very day" (*FC* 109-10). As the audience knows, they accidentally stumbled into the Guildhall; there was no plan to "seize" it.

Adapting, paraphrasing, or quoting directly from the Widgery Report, Friel has his judge come to the same conclusions Lord Widgery reached. Since the conclusions of the judge have been proved false by the action of the play, Friel in effect suggests that

Lord Widgery's conclusions may also be erroneous. Taking material straight from the Widgery Report, Friel exposes the ridiculous paraffin tests, ambiguous and inconclusive according to all the experts, but used to *prove* not only that the deceased fired a weapon but that he fired *first.*

In the last spoken words of the play, the judge summarizes his conclusions. In the first and third of these conclusions, Friel quotes directly from Lord Widgery's report. In the second, he paraphrases it (Widgery 38-39). In the final action of the play, the last visual image to strike the audience, Lily, Skinner, and Michael stand with arms raised, staring out, through a fifteen-second burst of automatic fire.

Friel was not alone among Irish writers to react to the events of Bloody Sunday and the Widgery Report. Thomas Kinsella, a poet from the Republic of Ireland and a long-time civil servant before turning writer and academic, produced his poem "Butcher's Dozen" within a week of the publication of the infamous report, hence its subtitle "A Lesson for the Octave of Widgery," referring to a church term for the eighth day after a festival.[22] The poem's title bitterly alludes to the term "baker's dozen," or thirteen, the number who died, substituting "butcher" to suggest the "butchery" performed by the British Army. Seamus Deane's "After Derry 30 January 1972"[23] and Seamus Heaney's "Casualty"[24] also respond

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[22]In *Fifteen Dead* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1979) 11-20.

[23]In *The Wearing of the Black: An Anthology of Contemporary Ulster Poetry,* ed. Padraic Fiacc (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1974) 57-58.

[24]In *Field Work* (London: Faber, 1979) 21-24.

to Bloody Sunday.[25]

Friel's concern, like Kinsella's, was that the Widgery Report not be passed on to posterity as "historical" truth. As we have seen, Irish writers have become acutely conscious of the way Ireland's history and image have been created by British words and discourses. Friel seems to have been determined in this play to discredit yet another example of a British document that falsified Ireland's image. He has certainly succeeded in that aim.

Both Seamus Deane and Nicholas Grene find fault with Friel for shifting away from realistic speech to be sure we do not miss "the morality of the plot," specifically for "substituting his own more articulate, more self-conscious voice" for the voices of the three characters when they describe their deaths (Deane "Writer" 15, Grene 67). Deane sees this as a problem of timing correctly the moment at which he should move from a particular crisis to its universal application, yet he believes Friel "comes close to his best work" when he "comes closest to the Northern crisis" and "risks sententiousness and judgement" ("Writer" 16). Grene believes the problem of the play lies "in the sense of control and purposefulness with which it is all put together," yet he believes it is made "important and impressive" by "the sense of creative struggle which was necessary to write [it]" (67, 65).

In its angry condemnation of injustice, violence, oppression, and prejudice, *The Freedom of the City,* might well have become a conflict of black and white issues, making it kin to the satire of

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[25]See Edith Hale Winkler, "Reflections of Derry's Bloody Sunday in Literature," for a discussion of these works.

The Mundy Scheme. It avoids this kind of reduction by its perceptive understanding and presentation of the condition of poverty and by the way in which it transforms the particularity of the Irish situation into a universal statement about human degradation and suffering.

In an interview with Eavan Boland, Friel said *The Freedom of the City* is "not about Bloody Sunday," but is "about poverty."[26] Friel's greatest gift may well be his ability to create character. In this play he puts that gift to good use in portraying the three marchers as fully developed, vital individuals, representing three distinct attitudes and adaptations to the culture of poverty. Again, Friel's kinship with O'Casey comes to mind. O'Casey's characters, too, take on unforgettable personalities even as they share a condition of deprivation and degradation. *The Freedom of the City* resembles O'Casey's great political plays more than any other of Friel's plays, yet it is distinctly Friel's own. The response evoked by the deaths of three individuals becomes a response to our own death. Hence, the possibility of injustice and violence invading the life of any one of us becomes very real. Whatever the individual political response, the inevitable universal response of indignation and regret makes *The Freedom of the City* one of Friel's most powerful and effective plays.

In spite of the anger and despair that is packed into the play, one cannot overlook a note of triumph that also exists, symbolized

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[26]Eavan Boland, "Brian Friel: Derry's Playwright," *Hibernia,* 16 Feb. 1973, 18, qtd. in Winkler "Reflections" 412.

by the three figures who remain standing at the end in spite of all the British Army can throw at them. Just as it is impossible for art to be purely nihilistic because the very act of creating constitutes a gesture of affirmation, so, in the very act of writing *The Freedom of the City,* Friel expresses a sense of conviction that the battle is not lost.

Volunteers

National Trust

Bottomless pits. There's one in Castleton,
and stout upholders of our law and order
one day thought its depth worth wagering on
and borrowed a convict hush-hush from his warder
and winched him down; and back, flayed, grey, mad, dumb.

Not even a good flogging made him holler!

O gentlemen, a better way to plumb
the depths of Britain's dangling a scholar,
say, here at the booming shaft at Towanroath,
now National Trust, a place where they got tin,
those gentlemen who silenced the men's oath
and killed the language that they swore it in.

The dumb go down in history and disappear
and not one gentleman's been brought to book:

Mes den hep tavas a-gollas y dyr

(Cornish)--
"the tongueless man gets his land took."

Tony Harrison's poem provides a remarkably apt parallel to Friel's *Volunteers* and serves as an appropriate introduction to the cultural

context of this play and the next play I discuss, *Translations.* With the incident of the "stout upholders of our law and order" who winched the convict down into the "bottomless pit" to settle a wager and drove him mad, Harrison illustrates how men may be rendered "tongueless" by the selfish, unthinking cruelty of other men. Smiler, one of the political prisoners in Friel's play, has been rendered "tongueless" by twelve consecutive hours of beating that destroyed his mind. The shop-steward of a group of seven stonemasons from the west of Donegal, he was beaten for leading a protest march when one of his men was interned. He is now reduced to a grinning, mindless shell of a man who can say little more than "That's right--that's right."

People may be rendered tongueless in another sense if their native language is lost. Although Harrison is English, the situation he describes concerning the Cornish language resembles the Irish situation. Those who deprive people of their language rob them of their ability to defend themselves and their possessions, and, by extension, of their culture and identity. Hence, they are as cruel as the men who sent the convict down the shaft and drove him mad. We have seen in *The Freedom of the City* how the poor are rendered tongueless in a different way by the privileged and powerful who distort the truth of their lives and deaths for their own purposes.

Smiler and four other prisoners in *Volunteers* have been "borrowed" and sent down into the earth to assist with an archaeological excavation. Although they have done more work than all the others involved (the foreman, the archaeology student, and

the professor in charge, who never appears) and have done it voluntarily, at the end of the dig they will be sent back to prison where they are to be punished, probably killed, by their fellow political prisoners, who regard them as traitors for collaborating with the "enemy" by volunteering to help with the excavation. If they escaped from the site, which would probably be easy, they would suffer a similar fate from some of their fellow countrymen on the outside who regard them in the same light. Nor can they appeal to those for whom they are working. These people see them as criminals and have no further interest in them after the work is finished.

Thus, instead of becoming heroes by volunteering, the five prisoners have become victims, trapped among the different factions of their country and doomed to "go down in history and disappear" and no one be "brought to book" for their deaths. The image of "disappearing into history" suggests the thirteen victims of Bloody Sunday for whose deaths no one was "brought to book" in the Widgery inquiry, and also the victims of ancient cruelty symbolized in *Volunteers* by the Viking skeleton unearthed and christened Leif by the workers. Leif has a leather rope around his neck and a hole in his skull. The question of what happened to him is never answered. Keeney speculates:

> Nice wee hole that in the top of the head. I wonder what did it? Maybe an aul' pick-axe. Lovely bit of leather that, too, isn't it? . . . But the question persists. . . . What in the name of God happened to him? D'you think now could he have done it to himself? . . . Or maybe a case of unrequited love, . . . Or maybe he had a bad day at the dogs? Or was the poor eejit just

> grabbed out of a crowd one spring morning and a noose tightened round his neck so that obeisance would be made to some silly god. Or--and the alternative is even more fascinating, . . . maybe the poor hoor considered it an honour to die--maybe he volunteered: Take this neck, this life, for the god or the cause or whatever. (*Vol* 25-26)

The play addresses some of the same questions Seamus Heaney addresses in poems such as "The Tollund Man,"[27] "Punishment,"[28] and "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces."[29] In "Punishment," for instance, Heaney describes the body of a young girl discovered in a bog in Germany. The girl was obviously a victim of tribal punishment, probably for adultery. Heaney draws a parallel with Irish women punished by the IRA for keeping company with British soldiers. Thus, the ancient past provides not a graveyard of relics, but a rich mine of symbol and myth that offers a valuable key to understanding human behavior in the present.

Volunteers shares Heaney's interest in archaeology as a search for identity. In one of his play-acting sequences, Keeney puts this idea into words. Pretending to be an archaeologist conducting a class of school children on a tour of the excavation site, he says:

> the more we learn about our ancestors, children, the more we discover about ourselves. . . . So that what we are all engaged in here is really a thrilling voyage in *self*-discovery. But the big question is: How many of us want to make *that* journey? (*Vol* 32)

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[27]In *Wintering Out.*

[28]In *North.*

[29]In *North.* See Ruth Niel's interesting article comparing *Volunteers* with this poem that was also based on the Wood Quay event and published in the year in which the play premiered.

Despite Keeney's ironical observation, Friel and Heaney continue to dig into the Irish past, in search of the Irish image, trying to piece together a unified vision of the Ireland of the future. As we have seen Friel saying in *Faith Healer,* although Ireland may not want to make this voyage of self-discovery, it must be made if there is to be a future.

One further parallel between Harrison's poem and Friel's plays lies in the term "National Trust," referring in the poem to a British association whose purpose it is to preserve for the nation places of natural beauty or buildings of architectural or historical importance. Harrison suggests that England has commemorated places where injustices have been done for the sake of progress or wealth. "Towanroath, now National Trust" is "a place where they got tin"--at the expense of the way of life or even the lives of the original inhabitants. In Friel's play the wheels of "progress" destroy the heritage of the Irish nation and the present existence of its "tongueless" men. The archaeological site should be part of Ireland's "national trust," and as Harrison says of Cornwall, so should the lives and culture of the Irish people.

Volunteers repeats ideas and motifs from *The Mundy Scheme* and *The Freedom of the City,* but goes well beyond these plays in development of the theme, as if Friel had built a momentum in the earlier plays that had not run itself out, or as if he had a lot of things he wanted to say on the subject that did not fit into the earlier plays. Like *The Mundy Scheme, Volunteers* deplores the destruction of Ireland's heritage for the sake of "progress" or

short-term profit, but, unlike the earlier play, this work alludes to an actual event--the Wood Quay affair. This controversy arose when it was discovered that the Dublin City Corporation intended to build an office block on the site of the Viking settlement from which Dublin originated, one of the richest archaeological finds in Northern Europe. Although archaeological excavations were not new in Dublin, this particular find in the center of the city attracted a lot of attention and led to demonstrations when people discovered that archaeologists were being given only a limited time for their work before the valuable finds would be buried forever under a mass of concrete. Although Friel makes no direct allusion to the Wood Quay event, the play takes place on "an archaeological site in the centre of a city," at "the present in Ireland" (*Vol* 11), and the archaeologists are given five months before a multi-story hotel will be built on the site.

The play shares with *The Freedom of the City* an anger over a political situation that encourages "creeping indifference, degradation and violence" (Heaney "Digging" 26). In this play, however, the anger is diffused if not defused. Friel has had his say about Bloody Sunday and the Widgery Report and turns now to the deeper causes of the situation. As Heaney says of *Volunteers,*

> there is an unrelenting despair at what man has made of man, but its expression . . . on the stage is by turns ironic, vicious, farcical, pathetic. . . . The play is not a quarrel with others but a vehicle for Friel's quarrel with himself, between his heart and his head. . . . It is more about values and attitudes within the Irish psyche than it is about the rights and wrongs of the political situation. ("Digging" 216)

As the five prisoners go about their routine duties, they learn that this day will be the last on the dig because the builders of the hotel refuse to wait any longer. While no one is noticing, Smiler walks away from the site and disappears. In order to persuade the other workers not to allow the foreman to call the police, Keeney, the virtual leader of the group, reveals that a kangaroo court in the prison has already decided to stage a riot, during the course of which the volunteers will meet "accidental" deaths. Keeney argues that, while the rest of them can at least fight for their lives, Smiler stands no chance and should therefore be allowed to take the slim chance he has of surviving in the outside world. The others reluctantly agree, but then Smiler returns, much to the relief of everyone except Keeney, who in an angry outburst calls Smiler an "imbecile" and the rest of them in their solicitous concern for Smiler's well-being, "imbecile acolytes fluttering about a pig-headed imbecile victim" (*FC* 60).

Butt, another worker, explains that Keeney is afraid because he persuaded the others to volunteer, and therefore the other internees will go for him first in their retribution. More than fear, Keeney feels frustration and rage at the fact that he has led the others to their deaths and can do nothing to change the injustice and inevitability of the situation. The blood of the other workers, including Smiler, will be on his hands. The play ends with the five convicts returning to prison to meet their fate.

Without the enrichment of its poetic qualities, the play would be little more than an account of an unfortunate situation in the

lives of five political prisoners. It relies on symbolism, wit, and allusion to convey its message. In fact, in reviewing the play, which was dedicated to him, Heaney says of Friel's earlier plays, "one occasionally sensed a tension between the vision and the form, as if a man whose proper idiom was free verse was being forced to realize himself in metrical stanzas" (215). While this is a natural analogy for a poet to make, perhaps it also suggests Heaney's recognition of the poet in Friel. Although the play is completely realistic and the action strictly chronological, fragmentation exists on the symbolic level. As Niel observes, the play

> blends three different levels of time: the time of the Vikings, represented by . . . trial pieces, an earthenware jug, a skeleton or the remains of a house; the Ireland of the present with its particular political problems; and the future, represented by the massive hotel, a symbol of a technological age which will literally bury and destroy the past. . . . Nearly every object and even some of the characters assume a symbolic meaning. They too are multi-dimensional. (37-38)

The archaeological site functions symbolically in much the same way the Mayor's parlor does in *The Freedom.* In his pose as guide for the schoolchildren, Keeney describes it as looking "more like a bomb-crater--or maybe a huge womb--or . . . like a prison-yard with the high walls and the watch-tower up there and the naughty prisoners trying to tunnel their way out to freedom" (*Vol* 31). The Mayor's parlor represents the insulated protection of a womb as well as the threat of violence and oppression suggested by the power and imperviousness of its construction and furnishings. In connection with the Viking past, the womb-like appearance of the

excavation site suggests a place of safety where the seeds of the past could ripen to be born in a future age where they would reveal their significance, but it also suggests the "Earth-mother, to whom human beings were possibly sacrificed in fertility rites" (Niel 38). In the present it represents for the prisoners a place of protection from the threats of the outside world, yet the bomb-crater and prison yard are both images of violence and victimization for the past as well as the present. The relics of the Viking civilization, including the skeleton of Leif, are to be destroyed by the powerful forces of the future in the form of "hundreds and hundreds of tons of hardcore" that is going to come "thundering down" (*Vol* 65). Although it is true the prisoners may have been guilty of violent crimes, the play emphasizes that they are soon to be violently destroyed by their own society, just as victims of the Viking society met violent death at the hands of their own tribe.

Pyne invents a story about Leif that illustrates the vehemence of tribal justice. As Pyne tells it, Leif and his cousin Ulf emigrated with their family from Norway and settled in Ireland on the very spot of the excavation, where they became Christians. In their twenty-first year they were crewmen of the first Viking ship to discover America. After some time there, Lief wanted to settle down, but Ulf became homesick and insisted on setting sail for Ireland, even though it was February. While Ulf loaded the ship with booty, Lief took only the Indian girl with whom he had been living. On the way to Ireland the winter gales washed Ulf and his booty overboard. When Leif and the Indian woman reached Ireland, no one

believed his account of the Atlantic gales. Instead, they insisted the Indian woman was evil and had killed Ulf. They burned her before Leif's eyes, then "put a rope around his neck, strung him up, and just for good measure opened his skull" (*Vol* 52).

One of the most important symbols is the Viking jug unearthed by Smiler and pieced together by the foreman, George--all one hundred and ninety-three pieces of it: "twelve inches high, green glaze, unpatterned except for gently fluted lip . . . early thirteenth century . . . priceless . . . beyond value" (*Vol* 15). George has worked fourteen weeks and two days assembling the jug and is justifiably proud of it. To Keeney, however, it is Smiler's jug: "Smiler's pieces all put together and making a handsome jug! . . . This is an omen. . . . It's a symbol. . . . This is Smiler, . . . Smiler restored; Smiler, full, free and integrated" (*Vol* 46). When Smiler escapes, Butt, the realist, says, "How can Smiler make it! . . . He doesn't know the day of the week it is. And when they catch him, they really will kill him this time." Keeney, the romantic, argues, "At least now he's not going to be a volunteer. And . . . he might escape--remember, fools have a long and impressive history of immunity" (*Vol* 47-48). But Smiler does not make it; he returns, the same broken man he was. There is no mystical transformation and no escape. Like Smiler, the jug is no more than a heap of broken fragments at the end of the play. Although Keeney and Pyne tease George by pretending to throw the jug, it is Butt, the "sensible" member of the group, who intentionally lets the jug fall to the ground and break.

Though Butt's action comes as a total surprise, Friel has supplied the motivation. As in *The Freedom of the City,* Friel has shown that the prisoners were intelligent individuals who led normal lives before political unrest and discrimination in their society disrupted their way of life. Although Knox looks like a "street person" and has little more intelligence than Smiler, he reveals that as a child he led a pampered life, learning the cello from a private tutor. Knox's anger shows Keeney is correct in suggesting that when Knox's father lost his "empire," Knox fell in with "subversives" because they paid him with money, food, lodgings, and, most importantly, companionship.

Pretending to tell Leif's story, Keeney and Butt reveal the background of Ireland's political prisoners. The men in the "movement" were men who had worked until they were exhausted and were "disposed of," or had worked for others for years and finally demanded a horse or a house of their own, or were evicted from their land because they had no title. Butt suggests that Keeney was "a bank-clerk who had courage and . . . brains and . . . was one of the best men in the movement" (*Vol* 58).

Butt has shown that he has more genuine interest in the archaeological find than any of the "higher-ups." He directs the work and insists that they "get some sort of covering" to protect the remains of the house from the elements. When Knox discovers a trial-piece with a drawing of a ship on it, Butt recognizes that, according to the chart on the office door showing ships in the Danish museum, either the dating of the level reached in the excavation or

the museum chart must be in error by at least two centuries. Butt dislikes Keeney for his flippant irresponsible ways and hates him for taunting him. He becomes angry when Keeney puts his job of cleaning the cesspit off on Smiler. However, when George confidentially warns Butt to stay away from Keeney because he is a "danger-man" and has "no loyalty to anyone or anything" (*Vol* 63), Butt breaks the jug.

To Butt, the jug has become a symbol of the misplaced values and lack of understanding of George and the men like him who care about their own personal gain rather than the lives of the men for whom they are responsible. The warder, Mr. Wilson, who transports the men to and from the prison each day, serves as the best example of this prejudice. He dismisses the prisoners as "bloody criminals," the product of genetic weakness: "you're either born right or you're not" (*Vol* 16). His chief concern during the course of the play is whether his daughter will pass her Grade Four music examination on the viola. Dr. King, the university professor of archaeology who heads the excavation, cares only that he has "looted enough for another coffee-table book," according to his student Des, referred to by the men as "Dessy the Red" (*Vol* 38-39). Des promises to support the workers if they protest the abandonment of the site before the excavation is completed. He calls it "a rape of irreplaceable materials, a destruction of knowledge that the Irish people have a right to inherit, and a capitulation to moneyed interests" (*Vol* 39), but after his meeting with Dr. King, he realizes his own position is at stake and capitulates, prompting Keeney and

Pyne to launch into one of their many spontaneous limericks:

> A student called Dessy the Red
> Preferred fellow subversives all dead
> I may quote Karl Marx,
> But it's really for larks.
> He's much better not done, only said. (*Vol* 56)

The selfish indifference of these representatives of society is almost as cruel as the unthinking brutality of the men in Harrison's poem.

The grim picture presented in *Volunteers* is, however, countered and sharpened by the incessant, irreverent, wise, and witty banter of what may well be Friel's funniest play. Keeney and his sidekick Pyne provide the repartee, the play-acting, and the nonsense that unnerve, annoy, anger, or are ignored by, the other characters. Friel's describes Keeney as: "*Quick-witted, quick-tongued, and never for a second unaware. Years of practice have made the public mask of the joker almost perfect*" (*Vol* 18). Keeney is a further development of the characters of Shane and Skinner. His humor is more of the gallows variety, more bitter, bawdy, and biting than that of either of these other characters. This is Friel's only play about men without women--the cast is all-male --and no feminine influence softens its harshness. Heaney suggests that Friel means to shock because "an expert, hurt and shocking laughter is the only adequate response to a calloused condition" ("Digging" 216).

Keeney also provides the source of the play's central allusion. At three different points in the play, Keeney poses the question: "Was Hamlet really mad?" (*Vol* 21, 26, 66). His closing line, the last line of the play, is "Good night, sweet prince" (*Vol* 70). He talks to and about the skeleton Leif, pretending he is alive, reminiscent of Hamlet's speech to and about Yorick's skull. These allusions suggest that Keeney is to be read as a modern Hamlet, no more or less mad than Hamlet the Dane, who might have lived in the same century as Leif the Viking. Keeney's word games, his plays within the play, are all calculated to discover or reveal the truth or at least to enable him to cope with the insanity of his world. As Heaney observes, Keeney is "a man who has put an antic disposition on, for Viking Ireland, like Denmark, is a prison. He is a Hamlet who is gay, not with tragic Yeatsian joy but as a means of deploying and maintaining his anger" ("Digging" 215).

In the final scene, when the other men turn to Keeney for some way of escaping the violence that awaits them, instead of giving a reasonable answer, he performs his final act of madness. He enacts a funeral for Leif before the skeleton is buried forever under the hard-core. This ceremony is marked "not by pomp and circumstance but by imitations of the kind of talk that attends such occasions, fond memories at first, followed by gossip and cutting down to size" (G. O'Brien 85). As George O'Brien has noted, Leif is an anagram for *life.* O'Brien has not followed this through, however, to observe that in saying goodby to Leif, Keeney is symbolically saying goodby to life, his life and the life of the other men, since their deaths are

almost certain to occur. As Keeney has said earlier, "Yes, one way or the other there's going to be a blood-letting" (*Vol* 48).

But the ceremony for Leif is another kind of symbolic farewell. Keeney begins his comments in the traditional way: "The last time I saw him--the first week of last May as a matter of fact--he was talking and laughing and joking as usual--the old Leif we all remember so well" (*Vol* 66). Of course, the first week of May was not the last time he saw Leif. The prisoners began work on the excavation during the first week of May and, at the same time, their fellow prisoners turned against them, as Wilson makes clear in the first scene: "Would you believe it, George, since the day they volunteered to work here five months ago--May 3, am I right? . . . Not one of their mates back there has broken breath with them" (*Vol* 16). Thus, the last time Keeney saw *life,* the old laughing, talking, joking life he remembers so well, was the first week in May.

The symbolic meaning of the ceremony goes still deeper. Keeney has confessed to Butt that his passions are "paltry flirtations . . . fireworks that are sparked by an antic imagination," rather than being "fuelled by a confident intellect" as Butt's are. He says that "the wildness and power" in him have evaporated and "all that's left is a mouth" (*Vol* 57). Butt insists that Keeney is still as sure of his passion for the cause "in his guts" as he was when he "shouted yes louder than any of us. . . . Five--six months ago. Before you volunteered for this job" (*Vol* 58). Keeney, however, is not so sure. For him the dig has been a voyage of self-discovery exactly as Friel and Heaney suggest digging into the past will prove to be for

Ireland. He has discovered in himself a different response to the cause of the Irish revolutionary. His ardor has cooled in the atmosphere of the excavation of ancient days. In the perspective of history, his cause has lost its fire. Friel's attitude remains ambiguous, but one implication of the play is that if Ireland could make this voyage of self-discovery into its ancient past and discover its identity, the frictions of the present would be cooled. In light of the centuries of Irish struggle, the present conflict would seem less significant, and those who are so emotionally committed to waging it might be brought to the point of a reasonable compromise.

The play is rich in texture and complexity of meaning. It is Friel's most tragicomic play. In no other play does such frenzied comedy cover such certain doom with such sustained tension. Perhaps the play has not played well on stage because sustained tension is hard to maintain and endure, and complex levels of meaning are difficult for audiences to unravel. Perhaps the structure, tone, and subject are more suitable for one of Heaney's poems than for a full-length dramatic production. Or perhaps the political content is not as popular as that of *The Freedom of the City.* Heaney's opinion that the play is more about "values and attitudes within the Irish psyche than it is about the rights and wrongs of the political situation" goes a long way toward explaining why the play may have been neglected, but also why it deserves not to be.

Conclusions

Thus, Friel's political plays have moved from scathing satire of the Irish Republic's government, through angry protest against the tactics of the Protestant control in Northern Ireland and the intervention of Great Britain, to a serious look at the cause and the fervor of the Irish conflict. If *The Gentle Island* is included with these three plays, one realizes that they represent a six-year period devoted to an examination of the roots of violence in a society. Nor can one escape the metaphorical dimensions of the characters in these political dramas.

The "tonguelessness," ineffectuality, and impotence represent both a symptom and a cause of violence and oppression in a society. The sense of frustration that accompanies these conditions builds throughout the course of the four plays. The inability to speak effectively, usually as the result of some kind of mental deformity or emotional injury, recurs as a symbol throughout Friel's drama. In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Gar's father is chronically taciturn and Gar himself suffers from some of the same difficulty in communicating. Fox's son has been declared autistic by a psychologist (*Crystal and Fox*), Ben Butler stammers (*Living Quarters*), Casimir has realized early in life, thanks to his father, that he will never enjoy the "easy relationships that other men enjoy," that if he had been born in the village, he would be the "village idiot" (*Aristocrats*), Lily's son Declan is a mongol, and Smiler is a grinning imbecile. In *Translations,* Sarah has such a serious speech defect that she has been thought dumb; when she

wishes to communicate, she grunts and makes unintelligible nasal sounds. In *Dancing at Lughnasa,* Rose is a simpleton. This list does not include those who are deaf, crippled, or impaired in other ways. In most of these cases, the play contains at least hints that the impairment results from some kind of physical or emotional damage.

These characters clearly suggest the Irish situation. They grow out of a culture that has been thwarted in expressing its needs, in articulating its experience, and in defining its identity. They spring from an ethos of impairment. Each character gropes toward self-expression. In the context of each play, the possibility of the handicapped character reaching wholeness exists. The thrust of each play extends this hope, but in each case the hope is dashed. The self-realization each person needs is denied, and in most cases the character is sacrificed, leaving no chance of his reaching fulfillment after the end of the play. For a very few, a faint hope still exists, but Smiler is not one of these.

The political plays build from the labyrinthitis, dizziness, and infantile dependence on his mother of F. X. Ryan, through the impotence of Philly, through the mongolism of Declan as a symbol of the tonguelessness of all the marchers and all the poor, to the idiocy of Smiler. Ryan's problems are symptoms of his total ineptitude as taoiseach. Philly's impotence, while Sarah suggests that it is a result of his father's behavior, leads directly to the violence that concludes the play. The impotence of the poor is both a symptom and a cause of the oppression and violence. The marchers are thwarted in the attainment of their needs by the oppressive majority

government. Their frustration leads to the demonstrations which in turn lead to their violent deaths. Smiler's idiocy grew directly out of his protest over injustice and his punishment by the authorities for this protest. It will also almost surely lead to his death at the hands of his own compatriots who exhibit no more evidence of humanity than their oppressors.

The "wise fool" characters--Shane, Skinner, and Keeney--represent another kind of adaptation to a culture of repression. These characters are far from tongueless. In fact, their volubility is the clearest symptom of their suffering. Their incessant role-playing, word games, and antic behavior are a cover-up for the desperate circumstances of which they are all too aware. They metaphorically represent the public mask adopted by the Irish people to hide their condition of inferiority and impotence.

Friel continues his concern with communication in three plays that focus on language and the ways in which it facilitates or impedes the communication of truth. As the plays in this chapter have shown him becoming progressively impatient with the political situation, so the next three plays reveal his increasing disenchantment with the adequacy of language to express the essence of being that needs to be communicated.

CHAPTER VII
HISTORY IN THE MAKING: THE LINGUISTIC CONFLICT

"*Con:* D'you think was the Flight of the Earls anything like this?
The Gentle Island (4)

Translations (1980), *The Communication Cord* (1982), and *Making History* (1988) are the last three of Friel's major plays before his current success, *Dancing at Lughnasa.* During the eight-year period spanned by these plays, Friel also produced two translations/adaptations, *The Three Sisters* (1981) and *Fathers and Sons* (1987), both based on Russian works, although Friel probably worked from a number of English translations. His interest in translating these works into Irish English led to his reading of George Steiner's *After Babel,* which had great influence on *Translations.* Steiner's work, as Pine points out, "underlines the difficulty of translation between privacies, between the deep core of meaning in two cultures, and . . . emphasizes the difficulty of apprehending the nature of individual truth" (152-53).

Friel's interest in the power of language is natural for an Irish playwright, but he carries this interest to new depths, reflecting not only the influence of current thinking on language but also his own perceptive and responsive mind. His explorations of the relativity of truth, of the ways the fictions of our past actually become facts in our present lives, and of the narrow boundary between reality and illusion have led to a deeper awareness of the

role of language as a shaper of our concept of reality and a molder of our image of ourselves. Discussing *Translations* and *The Communication Cord,* Kearney points out that Friel's "overriding concern is to examine the contemporary crisis of language as a medium of communication and representation." Friel is aware that language "does not exist in a timeless vacuum but operates in and from a specific historical situation" ("Language Play" 510).

In *Translations* Friel focuses on this connection between language and reality. Here he is drawing directly on the work of Steiner, who observes that language may go through periods of decay or decline as well as periods of energy and growth:

> Instead of acting as a living membrane, grammar and vocabulary [may] become a barrier to new feeling. A civilisation [may be] imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches, or matches only at certain ritual, arbitrary points, the changing landscape of fact. (*Babel* 21)

One of the characters in *Translations,* Hugh Mor O'Donnell, echoes Steiner's words: "It can happen that a civilisation can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of fact" (*Trans* 419).

In a play that centers on the death of the Irish language, the connection between language and our perception of reality becomes a vital issue. Does the death of a language mean the death of a culture? Does a change of name change the identity of a person or a place? Do we find ourselves in a strange land if the familiar place-names are removed? These are the issues of *Translations.* The theme is further examined in the next two plays: *The*

Communication Cord subverts it; *Making History* extends it. All three plays premiered at the Guildhall in Derry, the very building that serves as the setting for *The Freedom of the City.* They then toured the country with the Field Day Theatre Company. Of the three, *Translations* has been by far the most favorably received. From its opening night, it was widely acclaimed. Irving Wardle, the reviewer for the *London Times* wrote: "I have never been more certain of witnessing the premiere of a national classic" (11). In 1981 *Translations* won the Ewart-Biggs Peace Prize for Anglo-Irish understanding, the Irish-American Cultural Institute Award, and the Harvey's of Bristol Irish Theatre Award for the best new Irish play of 1980-81. Christopher Murray called it Friel's "masterpiece" (Rev. 239).

Friel and others have expressed two chief concerns about the play. Friel's main concern, recorded in his diary during the writing of *Translations,* was that the play not be political. He insisted that the play "has to do with language and only language," and that it "must concern itself only with the exploration of the dark and private places of individual souls," and not public issues ("Extracts from Diary, 1979" 58, 60). My discussion will address that concern. The other question involves the historical accuracy of the play. We shall see that question addressed by Friel, J. H. Andrews, and Sean Connolly.

Translations

The Cultural Context

Translations is based upon two important historical events: one, the establishment of a system of national education in which instruction was to be in English instead of Gaelic, as it had been in the "hedge schools," and, two, the Ordnance Survey of Ireland by the British Royal Engineers in which the country was mapped and all place-names were changed from Gaelic to English. These two significant occurrences took place at approximately the same time, in the early 1830s, concurrently with the advent of the potato blight that brought the years of famine and the increase in emigration.

The play is set in a hedge school in County Donegal in 1833. Hedge schools took their name from the fact that they were originally held out of doors behind a hedge because education had been proscribed under pain of vicious penalty by the anti-Catholic Penal Laws imposed after 1695. P. J. Dowling reports that "when the laws against education were less strictly enforced, school was taught in a cabin, a barn, or any building that might be given or lent, . . . but the name 'Hedge School' was still retained" (*Hedge* 35-36). Friel's hedge school is held in an abandoned barn.

These schools flourished in the early nineteenth century, increasing from four thousand in 1807 to over nine thousand in 1824 (Dowling *History* 99). The number of children attending school rose from 200,000 in 1806 to more than 560,000 in 1824 (S. Connolly 44). In fact, this demand for education was responsible for the establishment of a state system of education in 1832, the time of

Friel's play. Even at the end of the 1800s, however, certain parishes refused to allow the establishment of national schools and continued to support hedge schools.

Dowling reports that most hedge schools taught only reading, writing, and arithmetic, but he goes on to discuss the prevalence of Latin and Greek in the curriculum, saying, "But many of the schoolmasters were proud of the extent of their own knowledge; and having gone to great pains to acquire it, they were prepared to hand it on--or to show it off" (*History* 88). Latin and Greek were taught also with a view to preparing boys for universities and ecclesiastical colleges on the Continent. The schoolmaster in *Translations,* Hugh O'Donnell, puts great stress on Latin and Greek, revealing his pride in his classical education.

Education in the hedge schools was in Irish. Dowling believes "there can be hardly any doubt that the National Schools in their early days were responsible for discouraging the use of the Irish language" (*History* 93). When these schools were established, about two million people spoke Irish; by 1871 the figure was less than a million. Yet, who can say whether the Irish language would have fared any better if the national schools had not been established. The language question has been hotly debated for many years in Ireland.

According to Reg Hindley in his study *The Death of the Irish Language* (1990), "There is no room for honest doubt that the Irish language is now dying" (248). Hindley shows that this decline began around 1800, when the economic situation made it advantageous for

Irish-speakers to learn English as a second language. English began to be taught in most of the hedge schools with the exception of those in the Gaeltacht, the district in which Irish continues to be the principal language. West Donegal still has its living Gaeltacht. Hindley emphasizes that

> there was in effect no language question in Ireland in either the late eighteenth or the early nineteenth century. All Irish political leaders had come to accept that the future of Ireland and its people lay through the English language. (13-14).

Maire, one of the characters in Friel's play, refers to "The Great Liberator" Daniel O'Connell, himself a native speaker from west Kerry, who commended English, saying, "The old language is a barrier to modern progress" (*Trans* 400). The writer of the 1871 census report was confident that within a few years "Irish will have taken its place among the languages that have ceased to exist" (qtd. in Hindley 20).

This writer reckoned without the foundation in 1893 of the Gaelic League, through which "the position of Irish in Ireland has been transformed, but in ways not wholly to its advantage" (Hindley 21). Irish has continued to die as the language of a rural peasantry, but it is now greatly respected among all the people in the twenty-six counties of the Republic, and their children study it lengthily in school. These people, however, use Irish as a second language and have no intention of giving up English as their first language. In 1990 Hindley estimated the number of native Irish speakers who are likely to transmit Irish to their children as the language of the home

and community at only 8,751 (251).

With regard to Irish place-names, the other issue in Friel's play, mass confusion exists today as a result of the mapping done by the Ordnance Survey, which changed all these names to English and failed to preserve the Irish forms even though John O'Donovan and Eugene O'Curry attempted to collect correct Irish names. The published maps gave only Anglicized renderings and no attempt was made to print correct Gaelic forms, as was done in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. The records of the early survey were left unpublished and had little effect on the restoration of the Irish forms of names when the Gaelic League undertook this project. As a result, place-names vary so widely as to be hardly recognizable as the name of the same place. Mulrany in Mayo may be Mallaranny, Maol Raithnighe or An Mhala Raithní. As Friel points out in the play, the English place-names chosen by the surveyors often had no relation to the Irish meaning; that is, they were not "translations" at all. Some were chosen for the fact that they sounded like the Irish names (as in the case of Mulrany); others were arbitrarily chosen as new names for old places.

As for Friel's personal context for the writing of this play, he reports that two discoveries served as impetus. The first was his discovery that his great-great-grandfather McCabe had been a hedge-schoolmaster and was known to be "fond of a drop." This man is the pattern for Hugh Mor O'Donnell. The second was the fact that directly across the River Foyle from where Friel lives in Muff was the first trigonometrical base for the ordnance survey that was

begun in 1828. These discoveries led Friel to historical accounts of the hedge schools and the ordnance survey. He reports that he read "Colonel Colby's *Memoir of the City and North Western Liberties of Londonderry,* . . . the letters of John O'Donovan, who was one of the original surveyors, . . . *A Paper Landscape* by John Andrews, [and] *The Hedge Schools of Ireland* by Dowling" ("Extracts from Diary, 1979" 57).[30] In the program notes for the Irish production he quotes from Dowling as well as William Carleton's *Autobiography,* Edmund Curtis's *A History of Ireland,* and George Steiner (Murray Rev. 238).

Sean Connolly and J. H. Andrews, however, have questioned the "historical accuracy" of *Translations.* Connolly argues that the play "puts forward a crude portrayal of cultural and military imperialism visited on passive victims, . . . substituting caricature and political cliché for the recreation of experience" (44). So intent is Connolly on examining various details in the play for their adherence to factual records, that he has completely missed the larger meaning of the play. Friel's emphasis is on the experience of the ancient society, doomed because it does not match the contours of fact. As we shall see, and as critics and audiences agree, the strength of the play lies in the fact that Friel does re-create the experience of the individuals in this society.

Andrews, a cartographer and the author of *A Paper Landscape,* the history that Friel says inspired him to write the play, admits his concern over one detail of the play. When the soldiers are going

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[30]See Colby, O'Donovan, Andrews, and Dowling.

through the fields, "prodding every inch of ground . . . with their bayonets" (*Trans* 434), Andrews wanted to say, "But they didn't have bayonets. Before soldiers went on Survey duty they had to hand in their bayonets" (Friel, Andrews and Barry 120). Upon reflection and "following a hint from the text," however, Andrews then began to see the play

> rather as a set of images that might have been painted on screens, each depicting some passage from Irish history, ancient or modern, the screens placed one behind the other in a tunnel with a light at one end of the tunnel and the audience at the other, so that it is only the strongest colour and the boldest lines that appear in the composite picture exhibited on the stage. (Friel, Andrews, and Barry 120-21)

Andrews is thus able to see Captain Lancey's brutal threats as "projections, perhaps backwards, perhaps forwards, from some quite different period" (121). Andrews has hit upon a perfect analogy to explain any anachronisms in the play. The "hint from the text" he refers to is, no doubt, Hugh's statement that "it is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language. . . . We must never cease renewing those images; because once we do, we fossilize" (*Trans* 445). McGrath quotes a statement Friel made in 1980 that explains more clearly "what is at stake in Hugh's comment":

> In some ways the inherited images of 1916, or 1690, control and rule our lives much more profoundly than the historical truth of what happened on those two occasions. The complication of that problem is how do we come to terms with it using an English language. For example, is our understanding of the Siege of Derry going to be determined by MacCauley's history of it, or is our understanding of Parnell going to be

> determined by Lyon's portrait of Parnell? This is a matter which will require a type of eternal linguistic vigilance.[31]

It is clear from Friel's comments that for him history is not a matter of an "objective" account. It matters to him who constructs Ireland's historical images, and it is important that we be aware of the various images of history that may be offered us. Hence, in writing *Translations* he was more concerned that he present an accurate image of Ireland in 1833, one that reflects the truth of Ireland when seen though the screens of the past and the present, than that he adhere to the facts of the particular historical event. As Pine observes, Friel has examined the "already artificial histories of others . . . in order to create, out of all the available versions, a *possible* world in which the exercise in understanding and expression can take place" (156).

The argument over Friel's accuracy obviously hinges upon one's interpretation of the term "history." Kevin Barry points out that history may be conceived of as a discourse that distinguishes itself from other discourses by virtue of its "claim to objectivity," a discourse that purports to "discover a writing which exists before interpretation, a writing which only history can repeat." In this view, facts and events precede the language in which historians record them. History, then, is "mere event and place, the overwhelming and silenced past which disappears to elude any recording of itself." In another sense,

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[31]Qtd. in McGrath 541-42. The quotation was published in "'Talking to Ourselves': Brian Friel Talks to Paddy Agnew," *Magill,* Dec. 1980, 59-61.

> history is always already written: first, because the past of a society is never an unstructured or unimagined memory; second, because history, more than any other discourse except perhaps that of law, depends upon what has been written, upon the surviving documents which are the past's versions of itself. (Barry in Friel, Andrews, and Barry 118)

Friel's direct comment on the use of historical content is that the writer of an historical play must acknowledge the received facts or ideas, but not defer to them: "Drama is first a fiction, with the authority of fiction. You don't go to *Macbeth* for history" (Friel, Andrews, and Barry 123-24). Friel has more to say on this issue in *Making History.* We will now see how he takes an essentially political subject, gives it an historical context, and treats it on an individual, personal level.

Fragmentations

Friel's use of technical devices to fragment his characters and action moves in two new directions in this play. Characters are split to the extent that they are actually two people who share opposing characteristics. The most obvious example occurs in the characters of Yolland and Owen, who is called Roland by the British engineers who are his employers. Of course Owen is himself a split character who discovers his other side only at the end of the play, but it is as Roland that he supplies a foil for the romantic characteristics of Lieutenant George Yolland, the accidental soldier.

Yolland's father, a military man much like Captain Lancey of the Royal Engineers, had secured a clerkship for his son with the

East India Company and George was due to set sail for Bombay. When he missed the boat--probably on purpose--and hadn't enough money to wait for the next sailing, he enlisted in the army rather than face his father. He was assigned to the engineers and sent to Ireland. He immediately falls in love with western Ireland and, somewhat later, with Maire Chatach, one of the hedge school students. His idealization of rural Ireland is strongly reminiscent of Peter's attitude in *The Gentle Island.* Donegal is "heavenly"; Yolland feels as if he "had moved into a consciousness that wasn't striving nor agitated, but at its ease and with its own conviction and assurance" (*Trans* 416). He wants to apologize for the intrusion the surveyors have made into the lives of the local people, and he argues against changing the place-names, the very job he has been assigned to do. Like Peter he is so blinded by his romantic image of Donegal that he sees none of the evil that lurks in his Eden until it has swallowed him up. He is especially impressed with the way Hugh and Jimmy Jack Cassie converse in Greek and Latin and speak of Apollo, Cúchulainn, Paris, and Ferdia "as if they lived down the road" (*Trans* 416). Yolland is the sacrificial victim in this play. Living in a world of illusion is dangerous.

Owen/Roland, however, must also lose his illusions. Owen is the pivotal character. A foil for Yolland and a split character himself, he also has characteristics that oppose those of his brother Manus. He is the successful son, the one who has "escaped." Handsome, charming, and enthusiastic, he returns to his native parish in his city clothes, convinced that it doesn't matter whether

he is called Owen or Roland, and that "standardizing" the place-names that are "riddled with confusion" is a harmless and even noble endeavor, even if it means changing them to English. It is Yolland who realizes, "Something is being eroded. . . . It's an eviction of sorts" (*Trans* 420). Events conspire to bring Owen home in a different sense, to a recognition of his identity and the identity of his homeland. Before the play's end, he discards the book of new names and takes his brother Manus's place as caretaker of his father and his heritage.

The most unusual fragmentation is that of language. Although the language of the play is English, Friel must convince us that both Gaelic and English are being spoken onstage. He is able to do this by making it clear that some characters do not understand the words of others. He also provides a glossary that translates the Latin and Greek phrases that are spoken frequently. The British soldiers can speak only English, while the students of the hedge school, who are all young adults, speak Gaelic. They can also speak Greek and Latin to varying degrees of proficiency, but not English. The sixty-year-old "Infant Prodigy," Jimmy Jack, is fluent in Greek and Latin and speaks Gaelic, but not English. Hugh and his sons, Manus and Owen, are proficient in all four languages.

The high point of the language conceit occurs in the love scene between Yolland and Maire. When they escape from the dance into the Irish night, each wants desperately to communicate his newly discovered love for the other. Maire knows three English words--water, fire, and earth--and one sentence: "In Norfolk we besport

ourselves around the Maypole." She has no idea what the phrase means and mispronounces Maypole. The only Gaelic words Yolland knows are the place-names he has been "translating." As they struggle to express their feelings, they realize that place names are a kind of language they both understand. After repeating the place-names of his own area, a part of England that is actually near Norfolk, Yolland begins repeating the Gaelic names he knows. For a brief magical moment, he and Maire are brought together by this new "language."

Recurring Themes

Translations represents a kind of homecoming to a number of earlier themes. The sense of place, the use of place-names as a special language, and the "return to Eden" have been important in earlier plays. The theme of the "blighted land" recurs in the symbolic references to the "sweet smell." This smell is a sign that the potatoes are rotting in the fields. Its very mention inspires panic in the hearts of the hedge school students, who all depend on farming for their meager livelihood. Maire insists that the potato blight has never hit Baile Beag and that their constant "sniffing around for it" means they are looking for disaster. An insidious sweet, but threatening, odor is a perfect symbol for the lingering sweetness of the ancient life of Donegal that threatens the community because clinging to it, when it "no longer matches the landscape of fact," can bring disaster as surely as the potato blight. When the army tents catch fire in the last scene, Bridget mistakes

the odor of the burning canvas for the "sweet smell." Ironically, what she smells does signal the approach of disaster for the community.

Friel also returns to the theme of impairment as a symbol of the oppressed condition of Ireland. Sarah Johnny Sally has such a severe speech defect that she has given up trying to talk. When the play opens, Manus is teaching her to pronounce her name. She makes steady progress once she has spoken her name, and Manus's prediction that nothing can stop her now seems about to come true. When Captain Lancey tells the students that the community will be ravaged if Yolland is not found, Sarah is unable to speak her name under his questioning and implies that she has completely lost the ability to talk. Manus, too, is impaired. He limps because his leg was injured when his drunken father fell over his crib. Thus, Friel returns to the theme of the father-son conflict. Manus serves as housekeeper, nurse, footman, cook, and substitute teacher for his father, receiving only "the odd shilling" his father "throws him--and that's seldom enough" (*Trans* 412-13). He is therefore unable to marry Maire, who is preparing to emigrate to America because the farm cannot support her large family. She says, "There's ten below me to be raised and no man in the house" (*Trans* 394).

When Maire falls in love with Yolland and he is presumably killed by the Donnelly twins, Friel returns to another theme, that of tribal justice--or injustice. Like Shane in *The Gentle Island* and the volunteers in the play by that name, Yolland is being punished because he has crossed tribal lines and broken tribal customs.

Jimmy Jack indirectly points this out in his discussion of the Greek words *endogamein* and *exogamein,* meaning to marry within or without the tribe. Jimmy wonders if he is sufficiently godlike or Athene is sufficiently mortal for his marriage to this goddess to be acceptable.

As in Greek drama, most of the important action in the play takes place offstage and is reported onstage by witnesses. In *Translations* it is commented upon and evaluated within the protected womb of the schoolroom. This technique, however, rather than raising the play to the height of tragedy, gives it an elegiac tone. Although the play is an example of the kind of communal tragedy of which Csilla Bertha speaks, in which the suffering is double because the individual and the community suffer, the tone is that of "irreparable loss," essential to tragedy, but not tragic in itself.

The Myth of Baile Beag

Translations has overtones of a Greek pastoral elegy or myth. Its setting is pastoral, most of its characters are rustic, natural, unsophisticated herdsmen or farmers, content with their way of life. The language is Greek, Latin, or the vernacular--Gaelic Irish. The invasion of a foreign tribe, in the form of the Royal Engineers, disturbs the rural simplicity. The threat that one of the daughters of the native tribe (Maire) may be carried away by the invaders (Yolland) provokes violence (from the Donnelly twins). The presiding deity or deities, Hugh and perhaps Jimmy Jack, understand the

conflict but in their pomposity and aloofness appear to do nothing to alleviate the suffering. The play ends with Jimmy Jack announcing that he will marry *Glaukopis Athene,* the "flashing-eyed" goddess Athene, with whom he has been in love for years. He admits, however, that he is marrying her for companionship. The final speech is Hugh's translation of the opening of the *Aeneid,* predicting the fall of an ancient civilization, but Hugh stumbles in his recitation. Thus the play ends with the twilight of the gods.

Of course this comparison greatly oversimplifies the play, which is immensely richer and more complex than this reduction to myth suggests. Nevertheless, part of the play's charm lies in its aura of eternal significance. Hugh tells Yolland, "We like to think we endure around truths immemorially posited." Although Owen counters with "Will you stop that nonsense, Father?" (*Trans* 418), we may be inclined to attribute his reply to the fact that he is at that time not in touch with the timeless truths of his Gaelic heritage. Yet Hugh also tells Yolland in the same scene that "words are signals, counters. They are not immortal" (419).

In spite of his drunkenness and his habit of announcing that he intends to make three points and then never getting beyond the second, Hugh Mor (*Mor* is Irish for "big" or "great.") is much more than a pompous, ineffectual father-god figure. Pine is correct in calling him Friel's "most convincing and impressive character to date" (176). Though he may be arrogant and domineering on one hand, and forgetful and derelict in his duties on the other, he is the central persona of the play, the bastion of authority and wisdom who

"possesses, and can use, the inner strength" necessary to resolve the crises of the frightened children of his dying culture (Pine 176). As Yolland says, Hugh "knows what is happening" (*Trans* 419). He is the one who recognizes that "we must never cease renewing" our images of the past, "because once we do we fossilize" (*Trans* 445). He warns Owen, "To remember everything is a form of madness" (*Trans* 445). He tells Maire that "always" is a silly word, and he promises to teach her English, warning her not to expect too much: "I will provide you with the available words and the available grammar. But will that help you to interpret between privacies? I have no idea. But it's all we have" (*Trans* 446).

As Pine observes, in the figure of Hugh, Friel restores to life and dignity the fathers who have been "defiled and assaulted" in earlier plays. "In the conjunction of Owen and Hugh," Pine says, "Friel finds himself" (177). Those fathers who have been taciturn, weak, overbearing, destructive, and unable to pass their heritage on to their children, become rehabilitated in Hugh by recognizing that passing on a heritage also means passing on the awareness that a heritage is a living thing and therefore subject to growth and change.

Conclusion

Translations takes a volatile political issue--the age-old confrontation between the colonizer and the colonized--and transforms it into a drama of personal relations, full of human passion, warmth, tenderness, and tragedy. The political controversy

becomes a problem in communication between people who do not see things in terms of the same images because they do not speak the same language. The problem thus moves into a universal context. Most of the difficulties that accompany a breakdown in communication are folded into this play.

Each of us has two languages--the language he speaks to others and the language he speaks to himself. On certain rare occasions these two become one, when we are able to convey to others the essence of our private selves. Jimmy Jack is fluent in a language no longer useful for communicating. He must retreat into a world of the past, a fantasy world, where the words of his language live on in their full power and glory, but speak only to him. Sarah, too, must live in the private world of her own secrets because she has no public language.

On the other hand, Owen, when he is Roland, lives in the public language because he has lost touch with his roots. He has suffered the fate that we have seen threaten each of Friel's exiles. In losing touch with his home, he has lost touch with himself, so that he no longer places any importance on his name, that symbol of his identity. The places of his homeland and the identity that is vested in their place-names have also ceased to have significance in his mind. His journey home is a journey of re-discovery and self-realization like the journey of the volunteer archaeologists who dig into the past and, in re-creating the life of Leif the Viking, also re-create themselves. When Captain Lancey announces the eviction that will take place if Yolland is not found, Owen must translate the

English names he has bestowed upon the places of his homeland back into the Gaelic language so that his neighbors can understand. This act represents a symbolic return to his roots.

Around these who struggle to find and express themselves, the forces of society are at war. The force of oppression clashes with tribal loyalty and revenge. The force of progress battles with the ancient ways of life, and seems to be winning. In the life of Maire, the force of economic necessity confronts the need for freedom, love, and self-fulfillment. The decline of a culture, the impending death of a language, and the loss of the land's identity through changing nomenclature leave the inhabitants with intimations of disaster and doom.

They cope with their fears in various ways: through drink (Hugh and Jimmy); through escape (Maire will go to America, Bridget and "our Seamus" will hide the livestock and probably themselves "in the caves at the far end of the Tra Bhan" [*Trans* 441], Manus has gone to Mayo--but will any of them really escape?); through violence (the Donnelly twins); or though mischief and flippancy--a kind of madness as a "gesture," albeit an empty one. When Doalty surreptitiously moves the surveyors' poles twenty or thirty feet every time they turn their backs, Manus says it is a gesture, "to indicate . . . a presence" (*Trans* 391). The empty gestures and the ironic comedy of Shane, Skinner, and Keeney are similar attempts to cope with tragedy. Behind all these ways of facing disaster, the failure of language remains the critical factor. The private language has failed to find a union with the public language. Thus, we come

back to the divided self, the split personality, the national schizophrenia of the Irish.

Translations has been criticized for leaving so many things unsettled in its unresolved ending. We do not know what has happened to Lieutenant Yolland, or if his death or disappearance will cause the British to ravage the entire parish. We do not know if Manus will be caught and charged in Yolland's disappearance, or if the Donnelly twins will be discovered to be the culprits. Of course neither do we know what the future holds for any of the characters. I have quoted Murray earlier on the unresolved ending of this play: "Friel, the dramatist as poststructuralist, refuses to end any other way. The reticence is all" ("Friel and After" 28).

By leaving the tragic outcome of the play uncertain, Friel ends on the note of "potentially tragic crisis" that Frye found so effective in Chekhov. Yolland's sacrifice is the "point of ritual death," but Friel chooses to leave it "vestigial," in order to reinforce the spirit of hope that is the play's great strength. Behind its sense of irreparable loss, *Translations* holds out the possibility that on an individual level differences can be resolved and people can be joined in love and understanding even through barriers of different and lost languages, dying cultures, and landscapes that no longer bear any resemblance to fact. If some common ground of communication can be found, differences can be bridged, even if the language itself is vestigial, a reciting of place-names, or no words at all--only a kiss that brings down the house in *The Communication Cord,* or a ritual dance in *Dancing at Lughnasa.*

The Communication Cord

To emphasize that *Translations* is not meant to evoke a return to the myth of hidden, ancient Ireland as some lost Eden of the mind, Friel wrote *The Communication Cord*--a farce that successfully undercuts any image of historical Ireland as an idyllic place, explodes the myths, and subverts the language theory. As we have seen, Friel's intent in *Translations* is not to romanticize the past but to suggest that we must be prepared for the changes of the future. Yet the strength of its characters, the poignancy of its love story, and the sympathetic picture it presents of early nineteenth-century Ireland understandably enhance the appeal of an ancient way of life. Friel wrote *The Communication Cord* not to debunk the import of *Translations,* but simply to present the other side of the picture.

All the elements of the earlier play are given their reverse or mirror image in *Communication Cord.* The action is again set in rural Donegal, but the time is the present. The scene is a restored cottage. Every detail is an accurate replication of its time, the early 1900s, but *"one quickly senses something false about the place. It is too pat, too 'authentic'"* (*CC* 11). The hedge schoolmaster's reverse image is Tim Gallagher, a non-tenured junior lecturer in linguistics who is struggling to complete a doctoral dissertation titled "Discourse Analysis with Particular Reference to Response Cries." He explains that "all social behaviour . . . depends on our communicational structures, on words mutually agreed on and mutually understood. Without that . . . shared code, you have chaos"

(*CC* 18-19). The play proceeds to demonstrate that chaos. Before it is over, Tim decides he may have a bogus thesis and may have to rewrite a lot of his dissertation because "maybe the communication units don't matter all that much" (*CC* 85).

The play is a wild riot of mistaken identities in which all the characters have at least two names and are using words to convey some meaning other than that of the "agreed upon code." Characters lie, connive, misrepresent themselves, mouth empty platitudes, or are simply confused by having to speak in a language that is not their own. The plot involves a scheme proposed by Tim's friend Jack, a successful barrister whose family owns the cottage, to impress Tim's girlfriend and especially her father by inviting them to the cottage, pretending it belongs to Tim. The father is a doctor, a senator, and an "amateur antiquarian." If he can be sufficiently impressed, he may help Tim get a permanent teaching position. Tim and the daughter, Susan, can then get married. The situation is complicated by the arrival at the cottage of a number of people who are unexpected or whose arrival is untimely: Tim's colleague and former girlfriend Claire; a neighbor and general busybody Nora Dan; a German immigrant Barney, who wants to buy the cottage; and a French girl Jack has invited for the weekend who just happens to be a regular companion of the senator as well.

Both Jack and the senator speak in terms that parody Yolland's rhapsodizing about rural Donegal or Peter's idealistic view of Inishkeen, but whereas Yolland's and Peter's words represented honest illusions, Jack and Senator Donovan are spouting clichés of

empty pretense. The senator says:

> This silence, this peace, the restorative power of that landscape. . . . This speaks to me. . . . This whispers to me. . . . And despite the market-place, all the years of trafficking in politics and medicine, a small voice within me still knows the responses. This is the touchstone . . . the apotheosis. (*CC* 31)

A series of ridiculous mishaps occur, in one of which the senator manages to chain himself by the neck to the restored post in the cottage kitchen where the original inhabitants bedded their cows at night. When no one is able to extricate him, his tone changes rather drastically. The pretense and myth are abandoned as he explodes: "This is our native simplicity! Don't give me that shit!" (*CC* 70). By the end of the play not only is each character's true identity revealed, but his or her true nature as well. The pairing of couples is rearranged, and Tim discovers his real affection is for Claire, not Susan.

Tim's thesis has been that response cries spring from a desire to share experience, from a person's private language, and therefore rise above linguistic strategies of willful manipulation. He realizes, however, that he is unable to distinguish genuine response cries from those that are insincere and manipulative. Therefore he has been unable to finish his thesis or to decide whom he loves. When he and Claire become aware that they are conversing without exchanging units of communication, he decides, "Maybe the message doesn't matter at all. . . . Maybe silence is the perfect discourse" (*CC* 85-86). When Claire utters a genuine response cry, "Kiss me

then," and Tim responds, they lean against the supporting upright beam of the cottage and the whole building collapses around them, thus subverting even the tragic ending of *Translations.*

Making History

In *Making History* Friel returns to the general outline of his first play *The Enemy Within.* He treats the life of an important historical figure--one around whom a body of myth and legend has developed--in such a way that he explodes the myths, reveals the figure as human and flawed, and through him examines Irish conflicts of the present day. Hugh O'Neill lived in the latter part of the sixteenth century and died in exile in Italy in the early years of the seventeenth. Like Columba, O'Neill was an Ulster hero and the central figure in an important part of Irish history, but almost nothing is recorded about the man's thoughts. Sean O'Faolain has written a biography, *The Great O'Neill,* based on the facts of his life, and speculating on the nature of the man behind them.

Henry VIII, threatened by wars with foreign powers that might use Ireland as a base for attack, undertook to re-establish royal authority over the country. Having crushed the Kildare family in 1537, Henry had himself declared king of Ireland in 1541. He asked the Gaelic and Anglo-Norman leaders to surrender to his authority in exchange for new titles of nobility. Conn Bacach O'Neill, leader of the powerful O'Neill tribe, thus became the first Earl of Tyrone in 1542.

Hugh, his descendent, became Earl of Tyrone by the rule of primogeniture under English law. Hugh had been brought up in the English court, in the household of Sir Henry Sidney, and had fought for the English against the Fitzgeralds of Desmond in Munster. He had hopes, however, of reestablishing the claims of the O'Neills to the kingship of Ulster. Forming an alliance with other major Ulster clans, including the O'Donnells of Tyrconnell, he waged war against the English from 1595 to 1603. Realizing that he needed outside support, he asked the Pope and the king of Spain for assistance. Spain sent troops, but they landed at Kinsale on the southern coast, forcing Hugh's army to march the entire length of the island. The English defeated the combined Irish and Spanish forces in the battle of Kinsale in 1601.

The Irish forces by no means represented a united Ireland. Hugh had appealed for solidarity between the Gaels and between Catholics, but he still had many enemies among the Gaelic and Anglo-Norman tribes. His defeat was a major turning point in Irish history. It represented the end of the Gaelic clan system as a major political force; it left Ireland controlled by a central, external authority for the first time in its history; and it introduced fundamental population changes in Ulster, transforming that province from the most Gaelic and rebellious part of Ireland into the area most receptive to British influence.

Friel's play opens with Hugh busily arranging flowers in a large, rather bare living room while his personal secretary attempts to discuss matters of state, principally the various squabbles

occurring between families in the earl's--or chieftain's--domain. Archbishop Peter Lombard, Primate of all Ireland, and Hugh O'Donnell, Earl of Tyrconnell, arrive. While the archbishop reports on his unsuccessful efforts to secure financial help from the Pope for Hugh's military campaign, O'Donnell talks of stealing horses from a neighboring tribe and punishing another tribe for stealing sheep from him. Friel captures well the peculiar condition of a country caught in medieval tribal rivalries at the same time that it is trying to move toward a position as an important world power. Hugh O'Neill is regarded as the champion of the "militant spirit" of Counter-Reformation Europe by the archbishop, the Pope, and the Spanish throne (G. O'Brien 117), but he cannot get his local people to stop squabbling. Friel is again projecting contemporary problems onto the backdrop of history.

In the midst of these overlapping discussions of the affairs of the world, Hugh suddenly announces that he is married. Since he is forty-one and this is his fourth wife, O'Donnell greets the news with exclamatory praise and the archbishop offers congratulations, until they discover that the new wife is Mabel Bagenal, one of the "Upstarts"--the "New English"--and the sister of the Queen's Marshal, Sir Henry Bagenal, known locally as the Butcher Bagenal. When Hugh brings her in to meet them, Lombard and O'Donnell refuse to speak to her.

Thus the stage is set for the conflicts in Hugh's life. History says the rebellion he led from 1595 to 1603 ranks as the most sustained and successful of all Irish encounters with the British

army. Friel's play moves abruptly from these early days of hope and excitement to the final days of defeat and despair, ignoring the military victories and successful campaigns. He stresses the decisions Hugh must make between the loyalty he has pledged to the English Queen, and his devotion to the Irish people, his own blood kin. Like Columba, Hugh has an enemy within. In this case, his loyalty to Ireland and his people--however irascible, fickle, and petty they may be--wins over his good judgment, his affection and loyalty for England, and the intelligent arguments of his wife.

Mabel is one of Friel's remarkable female characters. She is "vulnerable though resilient, intellectually and emotionally acute, candid and passionate" (G. O'Brien 118). She says, "We're a tough breed, the Upstarts," and then in the same scene, "We're a tough breed, the O'Neills" (*MH* 18-19). Carrying Hugh's child, she follows him through the wilds of Ireland in the desperate days of the final campaign when there was nothing to eat and no shelter--only to lose the child and die in childbirth just before the final surrender.

Hugh writes an abject surrender, promising absolute loyalty to the Queen, in the hope that he will be allowed to continue to rule his people. Instead he is forced to flee the country and live his last days in Italy, drinking and despairing, while Lombard writes a glowing account of his life. In fact, the entire thrust of the play seems to be toward this last discussion of what constitutes "history."

Throughout the previous scenes we have seen Friel skillfully develop the discrepancy between the public and the private life. As

we have seen him do time and again, he portrays so well the mundane, ordinary, trivial rituals of daily life--the talk of herbs and flowers, the arranging of rooms and visits from relatives--that form the fabric of life against which birth and death take place and battles are won and lost. He captures the vitality of this side of life and the tragedy of the loss of it. In *Making History,* with the double irony of its title, the history the archbishop writes symbolizes the loss of this human side of life.

In his last scene Friel dramatizes a statement from the closing pages of O'Faolain's biography of O'Neill:

> his fingers touch the Archbishop's manuscript. . . . This is his life, his mind, his soul. . . . And every word that he reads is untrue. Lombard has translated him into a star. . . . He has seen it all as a glorious story that was in every thread a heartbreak. He has made Life into Myth.[32]

Hugh's argument with Lombard seems to prove the theory that history is not an objective account of the facts but is really much closer to fiction. When Hugh insists that he will fight to have the truth about his life told in his biography, Lombard explains: "People think they just want to know the 'facts'; they think they believe in some sort of empirical truth, but what they really want is a story." He claims, therefore, to be "offering a cohesion to that random catalogue of deliberate achievement and sheer accident that constitutes your life," and offering Gaelic Ireland two things: "this narrative that has the elements of myth" and "Hugh O'Neill as a

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[32]Qtd. in Pine 211. The statement is from Sean O'Faolain, *The Great O'Neill* (London: Longman, 1942) 280-81.

national hero" (*MH* 66-67).

Hugh has lost his final battle. He repeatedly asks Lombard what the account will say about Mabel. Although Hugh obviously thinks she was the most important person in his life, she will barely be mentioned because Lombard claims she "didn't contribute significantly to . . . the overall thing . . . didn't reroute the course of history" (*MH* 68). Thus is history made--not by the actors in it but by the language of those who write it.

Conclusion

In these three plays Friel has shown us three sides of the many-faceted linguistic controversy. Through these plays he has been moving steadily toward his next play, *Dancing at Lughnasa,* in which he looks at the important ways we communicate without language.

CHAPTER VIII

RITUALS AND MYTHS: RESOLUTIONS

Dancing at Lughnasa

"*Sarah:* In the eight weeks I was in Douglas I was at fifty-one dances. I wore out three pair of shoes. I never had a time like it."
--The Gentle Island (22)

With its emphasis on dancing and ritual, *Dancing at Lughnasa* brings a new dimension to Friel's work. Commenting on this play, Friel has said, "When you come to the large elements and mysteries of life, they are ineffable. So I use dance in the play as a surrogate for language." (qtd. in Kavanagh 134). Friel's concern with the inadequacy of language yields in *Lughnasa* to an emphasis on the ways we communicate without language--through movement and ritual. This new emphasis reminds us that even in his earliest plays, much important communication is non-verbal--a surprising comment for a writer in a country whose people are proverbially good talkers, but one more example of the way Friel comments indirectly on Ireland's problems. Here he tells us that the Irishman's glib tongue disguises, rather than reveals, his true feelings.

Until this play Friel has been concerned with how language and history (as a language construct) shape our view of the world and of ourselves. He has shown people trapped in their illusions, their emotions, or in events and circumstances over which they have no

control. With *Lughnasa* he tackles that most elusive of entrapments--the pervading myths that shape our culture and hence our lives. In a play that centers on the lives of five Donegal women, the myths consist chiefly of those that have grown up around Irish women. They include the myths about sexuality and the role of women that were prevalent in Ireland in the 1930s, the time period of the play, and the myths that persist today. They include also the myth of Ireland as a woman, offering inspiration to Irish poets and patriots, but leading men to their deaths. The play forces us to look critically at prevailing myths about women and sexuality and especially at this myth of Ireland as a *femme fatale*--a myth that is deeply embedded in the Irish consciousness.

The Cultural Context

Friel's central characters are "those five brave Glenties women," as he calls them in the dedication. Kate, aged 40, the financial mainstay of the household, teaches school; Maggie, 38, housekeeper and cook, provides emotional support and balance; Agnes, 35, and Rose, 32, make a little money by knitting gloves at home; Chris, 26, youngest of the unmarried sisters, is the mother of Michael. The sisters treat Rose, a simpleton, with fondness, indulgence, and exasperation. The world of these five sisters is crumbling around them. They live a hand-to-mouth existence in which any change can mean disaster. As they watch helplessly, the pilings are swept away and their home collapses.

The desperate circumstances in which the sisters live were the lot of most of Ireland's rural population from the famine years until recent times. In earlier chapters I have cited Arensberg and Kimball's study of *Family and Community in Ireland*, based on two years of research in County Clare during 1931-32. Friel's play takes place in County Donegal in 1936. Roughly the same size as Donegal, County Clare also borders the Atlantic. In the 1930s Clare in Munster, the southwestern province, and Donegal in Ulster were both rural counties with spectacular scenery, few people, small farms, no large cities, and little industry. Although Pine believes that in *Lughnasa* Friel is writing "more directly in the autobiographical mode than he has since *Philadelphia*" (224), and the dedication of the play supports Pine's opinion, Friel might well have taken all his material from Arensberg and Kimball, so closely does the play's situation parallel their findings.

We have seen how successive famines in the early nineteenth century reduced Ireland's population by starvation and disease and led to a steady reduction by emigration that still continues today. This continuous population reduction left Ireland an economically depressed nation. Life in the rural counties continued at the pace, and with the customs and habits, of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Friel makes use of this situation in *Lughnasa* when he sets the play in a depressed rural area where the cultural and economic progress of the twentieth century has been slow in coming.

The area is remote enough to make it believable that the Celtic feast of Lughnasa was still celebrated with faithfulness to

centuries-old customs. The inhabitants of this region retain some of their primitive instincts, though they are in touch with the world of the 1930s in other ways. For example, the sisters, who know the latest Cole Porter songs, revert to streaking their faces and donning Father Jack's surplice to engage in a primitive dance when their wireless radio plays *ceidlidh* music. The people in the hills, described as "savages" by Kate, still celebrate Lughnasa with animal sacrifice and by driving their cattle through fire "to banish the devil out of them" (*DAL* 16).

By focusing on the five unmarried Mundy sisters, Friel calls attention to another anomaly--the fact that in the 1930s Ireland had the largest percentage of unmarried men and women of any country in the world. The number of unmarried adults in Ireland in 1926 was almost double that of other western nations. These startling statistics grew out of the same factors that reduced Ireland's population--chiefly the famine, economic depression, and the matchmaking system. We have seen how these conditions held Irish sons in dependent status, forced farm sons and daughters to emigrate to cities or other countries, and led to marriages being postponed until couples--or at least men--were well into middle age.

Since the Glenties sisters have no father to offer money or land as dowry, and since their county has very few eligible men, their chances of marrying are slim. Other difficulties arising from such a rigid system are also apparent in *Dancing at Lughnasa.* In the rural community during the time represented in the play, women had

little opportunity to support themselves. Occupations for the rural population not engaged in agriculture were few. Friel's Donegal women work in the only occupations available to them. Kate's schoolteaching is considered a suitable occupation for a woman. As knitters, Agnes and Rose are part of a once widespread cottage industry in wool and linen that was still practiced in remote parts of Donegal and Kerry until the 1930s when De Valera's program of industrialization replaced it with factories (Arensberg and Kimball 224-25). Chris and Maggie engage in home duties until Chris goes to work in the new textile factory.

Another corollary of the "matchmaking" system is the attitude toward sex among Ireland's rural population. As we have seen, women are valued and praised for their fecundity. Only married men and women who are still engaged in producing offspring are permitted to have any kind of sexual interest. Among others, interest in sex exists only as an evil but powerful force that must be constantly controlled. Arensberg and Kimball believe that the "'earthiness' and the ribaldry of the country people [concerning sexual matters] is not an antithesis to their strict moral code. Rather it reinforces it" (200-01). The sexuality expressed by Maggie in a definitely humorous vein could be regarded as normal in a rural setting. On the other hand, the rigid disapproval and piety that Kate expresses are also in keeping with attitudes that required sex to be part of marriage and only that. Michael refers to the "shame Mother brought on the household by having me--as it was called then--out of wedlock" (*DAL* 9).

The value attached to children, however, is clear. The beautiful twin daughters of Bernie O'Donnell awaken much admiration, and Maggie is obviously envious. When Rose reminds them twice that "Mother used to say twins are a double blessing," Kate retorts "You've offered us that cheap wisdom already" (*DAL* 19), revealing her unhappiness with her childless state. All the sisters value Chris's son Michael; Rose wishes he were hers.

Friel makes it clear that the sisters are not single by choice and that they have a healthy interest in sex. Chris, though refusing to marry Gerry, welcomes his visits. Although she is so pale that Kate buys cod-liver oil for her, her appearance changes when Gerry comes around. Even Kate, who disapproves, remarks, "Her whole face alters when she is happy, doesn't it? . . . She's as beautiful as Bernie O'Donnell any day, isn't she?" (*DAL* 33). Although Kate admonishes Chris that if Gerry stays overnight, he sleeps "in the outside loft. And alone" (*DAL* 26), later in the play Gerry invites Chris to join him in the tree he has climbed, saying "We never made love on top of a sycamore tree" (*DAL* 62). Maggie, "the joker of the family" (*DAL* 1) and apparently a later version of "Aunt Maggie, the Strong One," frequently refers to her vagabond nature, singing verses from "The Isle of Capri": "I said 'Mister, I'm a rover. Can't you spare a sweet word of love?'" (*DAL* 6). In her lively banter, she clearly shows that the Wild Woodbine cigarettes she smokes are a poor substitute for what she really craves: "Wonderful Wild Woodbine. Next best thing to a wonderful, wild man" (*DAL* 23). When Chris, watching young Michael playing alone, comments, "Pity

there aren't some boys about to play with," Maggie rejoins: "Now you're talking. Couldn't we all do with that?" (*DAL* 5). Later, she says, "If I had to choose between one Wild Woodbine and a man of--say--fifty-two--widower--plump, what would I do, Kate? I'd take fatso, wouldn't I? God, I really am getting desperate" (*DAL* 62).

Even Kate blushes and becomes angry when Rose accuses her of going into Morgan's Arcade in order to see Austin Morgan, apparently one of the few eligible bachelors in the county. Agnes, who seems to share Chris's infatuation with Gerry, becomes nervous and develops a headache when he comes to visit Chris. Rose causes alarm when she slips away and goes to meet Barney Bradley "up in the hills," a man who, the other sisters are sure, is taking advantage of her "simple" nature, but whom she loves because he calls her his "Rosebud" and has given her a silver charm pin.

Through this intimate view of the sister's attitudes, Friel provides an indirect comment on the findings of Arensberg and Kimball. Although the sociologists no doubt reported accurately the prevailing mores with their taboos and constraints regarding sexual behavior, Friel shows that private attitudes toward sex, while well aware of the taboos, often defied the mores.

The Feast of Lughnasa seems to have awakened a Dionysian streak in everyone. Even seven-year-old Michael has painted his kites with faces that Kate describes as "scarifying": "What are they? Devils? Ghosts? I wouldn't like to see those lads up in the sky looking down at me!" (*DAL* 9). And poor Father Jack goes around quoting lines of poetry:

O ruddier than the cherry,
O sweeter than the berry,
O nymph more bright,
Than moonshine night,
Like kidlings blithe and merry,

and saying, "You see, Kate, it's all coming back to me" (*DAL* 46). But he never remembers where the lines are from--he rejects his guess of Gilbert and Sullivan--and he never quotes the rest of the poem.

The lines would not be familiar to many members of the audience.[33] They occur in John Gay's pastoral opera *Acis and Galatea.* The remaining five lines of the air are these:

Ripe as the melting cluster,
No lilly has such lustre
Yet hard to tame,
As raging flame
And fierce as storms that bluster.[34]

Polyphemos, the Cyclops, sings the air, expressing his love for Galatea. Acis is in love with Galatea and she with him. Polyphemos, out of jealousy upon finding them together, crushes Acis with a huge rock, whereupon Galatea gains her father Nereus's consent to change Acis into a river. The mood of the lines Father Jack quotes suits the amorous, reckless mood of the play--a mood inspired by the pagan spirit of Lughnasa. When the last three lines of the poem are known, there is a definite suggestion of awakened female aggressiveness

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[33]Compare Friel's use of the quotation from Edmund Burke in *Philadelphia,* a little known quotation whose relevance is at first obscure.

[34]*The Poetical Works of John Gay,* ed. G. C. Faber (London: Oxford UP, 1926) 428.

behind the sensual images of the first seven lines. The poem also expresses the tone of Michael's lines in his opening speech: "a sense of unease, some awareness of a widening breach between what seemed to be and what was, of things changing too quickly before my eyes; of becoming what they ought not to be" (*DAL* 2). Polyphemos's arrival in the opera represents an approaching doom; Father Jack's reciting of the poem signals the same thing.

Almost ninety years ago an Irish audience rioted at John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* partly because they thought the play besmirched the virtue of Irish womanhood. In many ways Irish views have not changed. In fact, in some cases attitudes toward sex and the role of women have become more rigid as a result of the border and the division between North and South that has polarized Catholics and Protestants. *Dancing at Lughnasa* is a strong statement on the injustice of discrimination against women. By portraying the unfulfilled existence of women in a bygone era through the device of a memory play, Friel can bring to the audience's attention the inequities that still exist.

A brief look at Ireland today shows more similarities than differences between the cultural context of the play and that of its contemporary Irish audience. The original 1922 Irish Free State constitution had no explicit moral or religious overtones. It emphasized the fundamental sovereignty of the people, and even provided scope for divorce in a limited range of circumstances. De Valera's 1937 constitution, still in effect today, was explicitly ethnic and religious. It affirmed the "special position" of the

Catholic church as "guardian of the faith of the great majority of the citizens" (Article 44), affirmed "the family as the natural and fundamental unit group of society . . . possessing rights antecedent to and superior to all law (Article 41.1), and promised that "No law shall be enacted providing for the dissolution of marriage" (41.3.2). It stressed the place of women in the home, promising to ensure that mothers would not be forced by economic necessity to work outside the home (Article 41.2.2).

A 1983 referendum to make the existing legal prohibition against abortion an amendment to that constitution carried, while some three thousand Irish women go to England every year for abortions. As I write this, a fourteen-year-old girl who is the victim of rape, is challenging the Irish law that not only prohibits abortion in Ireland but prevents her from legally seeking an abortion in England. In 1986 a constitutional amendment to allow divorce was defeated in referendum by a two-thirds majority. The marriage rate has gradually risen, however, so that by 1981 the number of Irish marriages approached normal European levels for the first time in this century.

The Family Planning Act of 1985, which finally made the purchase of contraceptives available to all adults, has brought enormous change. Having only two or three children instead of nine, ten, or more, is now the norm. Eithne Fitzgerald reports that by 1988 Irish women were better educated and a majority had modern, well-equipped homes. But women still suffer economic inequality.

Despite more than a decade of laws requiring equal pay, women's earnings in industry average sixty per cent of men's. The proportion of married women with jobs in Ireland is half the European Economic Community (EEC) average (266-67). Fitzgerald reports on another clash within the fragmented culture of contemporary Ireland:

> The conservative tide of Reagan's United States, of Thatcher's Britain, of Pope John Paul II's papacy, has led not only to the emergence of a New Right in Ireland, but also to a resurgence of the old one and a revival of traditional attitudes. . . . At the same time, the realities of modern life have led to increasingly liberal attitudes--in urban areas and among younger people--toward authority, sexual morality and separation of church and state. (268)

These facts roughly describe the situation in the Republic of Ireland when *Dancing at Lughnasa* premiered at the Abbey Theatre in 1990. In Northern Ireland things were somewhat different. In fact, one of the chief arguments Northern Irish advance for remaining separate from the Republic is their desire to retain religious freedom and to avoid governmental control over individual liberties, especially in the sphere of family and sexual matters. Although Northern Irish Protestants may share the fundamentalist moral values of Irish Catholics, they regard the use of secular legislation to enforce those values as an infringement on their civil liberties and freedom of choice.

Fragmentations

Like Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie, Dancing at Lughnasa* is a memory play. These plays are similar in their

reliance on music to comment on the action, their emphasis on unfulfilled dreams and desires, their settings within the confines of a single family whose rituals are upset by the entrance of a solitary male outsider, and their conflicts between the demands of propriety (represented by Amanda in *Glass Menagerie* and Kate in *Lughnasa*) and the need for freedom to grow and develop creatively (represented by Tom in *Menagerie* and Michael in *Lughnasa*). This theme of entrapment extends, of course, to *Menagerie*'s Laura and to all the Glenties sisters. Although not as intense in its probing of psychological depths, Friel's play embraces a much broader sphere of experience.

Friel uses fragmented characters to define the play's main conflicts. The narrator Michael is technically split, not between public and private selves like Gar O'Donnell in *Philadelphia,* but between youth and adult, the past and the present. The actor in the role of Michael must speak as an adult remembering his past and as his seven-year-old self who plays a role in the action. Young Michael has no physical presence to represent him, and Friel directs that the actor speak in his ordinary narrator's voice when speaking for the boy. He further states: "No dialogue with the boy Michael must ever be addressed directly to adult Michael, the narrator" (*DAL* 7). The audience has only its imagination and the gestures and words of the other characters to support the presence of young Michael on the stage. In *The Glass Menagerie* the actor who plays Tom narrates the remembered action and plays Tom in the action remembered, an impossibility in Friel's play because of the age

difference in the two characters. This double role device is, of course, common in movie flashbacks. The difference in *Dancing at Lughnasa* is that no one is present in the portrayal of the memory except in our mind's eye. This technique supports one of the play's major themes: the way fiction becomes fact in human experience.

Removing the physical presence of the narrator as child reinforces the idea that our past is a fiction created by our imaginations. In the final speech of the play, Michael says:

> But there is one memory of that Lughnasa time that visits me most often; and what fascinates me about that memory is that it owes nothing to fact. In that memory atmosphere is more real than incident and everything is simultaneously actual and illusory. (*DAL* 71)

He goes on to describe a memory of dream music and rhythmic dancing that we will examine later. In 1972 Friel commented on this relationship between fact and fiction in memory:

> What is a fact in the context of autobiography? A fact is something that happened to me or something I experienced. It can also be something I thought happened to me, something I thought I experienced. Or indeed an autobiographical fact can be pure fiction and no less true or reliable for that. ("Self-Portrait")

To illustrate this line of thought, Friel relates an incident from his life that he now realizes and acknowledges could never have happened:

> The boy I see is about nine years old and my father would have been in his early forties. We are walking home from a lake with our fishing rods across our shoulders. . . . And there we are . . . singing about how my boat can safely float through the

> teeth of wind and weather. That's the memory. That's what happened. ("Self-Portrait")

When he wrote these words, Friel had already used an incident similar to this as the emotional center of *Philadelphia*, as we have seen in Chapter III.[35] Now he returns to this dichotomy in the closing moment of his most recent play, indicating the centrality of the concept to his vision.

Father Jack, 53, older brother of the five Mundy sisters, is also a fragmented personality. He has recently returned from twenty-five years as a missionary priest at a leper colony in Ryanga, Uganda, where he has spoken Swahili most of the time. He cannot adjust to life in Donegal. His main problems are with language and spatial arrangement. He cannot find the correct words to express himself, he cannot remember his sisters' names, and he cannot find his way around. He says: "I don't remember the--the architecture? --the planning?--what's the word?--the lay-out!--I don't recollect the lay-out of this home . . . scarcely" (*DAL* 17). He is suffering from malaria and possibly from mental derangement resulting from the shock of being relieved of his duties because he has "gone native" and adopted highly unorthodox religious practices with his leper flock. (Shades of Mr. Kurtz!) His real problem, however, is that he is living in a time warp. He has embraced the primitive culture, language, and thought patterns of the Ryangans, and one side of his brain refuses to return to twentieth-century Ireland, while

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[35]See the incident of the blue boat, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* 94-96.

the other side struggles to adapt. Thus Friel incorporates two of his earlier themes: the power of language to control our view of life and the difficulty of breaking long-established patterns of thought.

The third male character, Gerry, 33, is in danger of being a stereotype--the vagabond with illusions of greatness but only empty promises for his bastard son and the boy's mother, whom he says he loves but with whom he cannot settle down. Gerry is leading a double life with a wife or lover and family in Wales while he is begging Chris to marry him, but we don't learn that until the end of the play. Perhaps one part of him would like to be faithful to Chris, but he is too wedded to his vagabond ways

Although all five Mundy sisters are held by the restraints of society and yearn for a life of freedom and experience that their limited social and economic circumstances cannot afford, the effect of this restraint varies from sister to sister. Only Kate shows a split in her personality. Her natural inclination to respond with her emotions constantly conflicts with her acquired concern for the demands of society and organized religion. This results, of course, from the fact that she holds a public position as schoolteacher and realizes that position depends upon her conforming to the moral standards of the community.

The other sisters express their rebellion against society. They are willing to risk the disapproval of the community to attend the harvest dance. Their respect for Kate's position stops them. Both Chris and Agnes respond to Gerry's advances. Although he is an irresponsible ne'er-do-well, both women are sexually attracted to

him. He is the father of Michael, Chris's son, and the play implies that, while Chris will not marry him, their relations have not ended with Michael's birth. Agnes is restrained in her response to Gerry by the fact that he "belongs" to Chris. Maggie is unrestrained in expressing her feelings, and Rose, in her "simple" state is completely natural.

Except for Kate the women in the play are well-integrated individuals with a firm grasp on reality. They make decisions, face difficulties, and show an acute awareness of the feelings of others. They have their unrealized dreams and disappointments, but only Kate is divided. Their desires are frustrated by outside forces, but only Kate has conflicting desires.

Kate vacillates between almost approving of Gerry because he makes Chris happy and violently disliking him. Michael says, "But she [Kate] was wrong about my father. I suppose their natures were so out of tune that she would always be wrong about my father" (*DAL* 42). Michael's statement sets Kate and Gerry up as symbols, representing the clash between Christian and pagan values. Kate is not a flat character however. She wavers in her decision about the harvest dance. At one point she appears to give her approval. Then she disapproves and puts an end to the other sisters' hopes. At first Kate seems shocked at the wild revel the sisters indulge in as they dance around the kitchen to the Irish music from the wireless. Then she joins them, but she dances "alone, totally concentrated, totally private; a movement that is simultaneously controlled and frantic; . . . a pattern of action that is out of character and at the same time

ominous of some deep and true emotion" (*DAL* 22).

Although Kate must carry, in the structure of the play, the symbolic burden of repression, Friel elicits the audience's sympathy for her. She confesses her fears to Maggie: fears that she will lose her job (she does), that she will not be able to hold the household together (she cannot), that something terrible will happen to Rose (it does). Her fears are not illusions; hers is the voice of duty in the midst of the Lughnasa madness. She is able, through her persistent efforts, to return Father Jack to something close to normal physical and mental condition, but she cannot rescue him from his lapse into heresy, and when he dies she is "inconsolable." She represents the voice of authority against which we all rebel at times. Sometimes narrow, misguided, and unpleasant in her demands, she also may be the voice of wisdom, the "crone" in the trinity of goddesses. True affection for her family battles with a sense of responsibility heightened by the fear of losing the approval of church and community. Her piety and her affection often clash; she hesitates between love and duty, support and disapproval.

The only verbalized comment on a difference between the sexes is Gerry's: "Maybe that's the important thing for a man: a *named* destination--democracy, Ballybeg, heaven. Women's illusions aren't so easily satisfied--they make better drifters" (*DAL* 51). Perhaps the female characters are integrated because they are simply drifting, not concerned with finding a destination. More likely they are integrated because they have a mystical connection with the earth and its objects and activities--its rituals.

Myths

Although Gerry is a weak, feckless human being, in the context of the play he represents the handsome, lusty sun-god Lugh, whom the feast of Lughnasa celebrates. Gallagher points out the connection between the Greek god Hermes, the Gaulish Mercury, and the Celtic Lugh, whose harvest feast, *Lá Lughnasadh* or *Lughnasa,* is being celebrated during the time-frame of the play. Gallagher observes, "The mercurial Gerry . . . seems in diverse ways to be a reincarnation of Lugh. . . . He wears a straw hat and carries a cane: reminiscent perhaps of the caduceus and petasus of . . . Mercury?" (12). Friel undoubtedly had this connection in mind. Proinsias MacCana in *Celtic Mythology* points out that it is "commonly accepted that Mercury and the Irish god Lugh are one" (27). The Roman Mercury, god of the crossroads and messenger of Jupiter, wore winged sandals. Caesar describes a Gaulish god Mercury, whose Gaulish name has nowhere been recorded, but whose place as most honored of the gods is confirmed by archaeological evidence. The Gauls regarded him as "the inventor of all the arts and a guide on roads and on journeys . . . and the most influential for money-making and commerce" (MacCana 27). His arts also included that of war. Celtic Lugh's sobriquet *(Sam)ildánach* means "possessing or skilled in many arts (together)." His name means "The Shining One." Youthful, athletic, and handsome, he is also the divine father of Cúchulainn (MacCana 28).

Although most of these details apply to Gerry, the application involves considerable irony. As a travelling gramophone salesman

and general drifter, he would be an authority on crossroads and journeys. His skill in the arts includes dancing (Could it be the winged sandals?) and repairing wireless radios. He achieves miraculous success in this latter venture merely by climbing a sycamore tree and adjusting the radio's aerial, talking all the while of checking the radio's "ignition and sparking plugs." He is full of schemes for making money, though none of them ever materializes. When he enlists in the army, he becomes a dispatch rider or messenger. He is wounded when he crashes his motor-bike. Handsome enough to charm Michael's mother, who loves him but refuses to marry him because she perceives his vagabond ways, he could well be the "divine" father of young Michael since he is not his legal or "earthly" father. According to MacCana, "some deities like Lugh are the reported progenitors of many widely scattered peoples" (42). Near the end of the play, we learn that Gerry has a family in Wales with another son named Michael of the same age. Finally, MacCana relates that when Conn of the Hundred Battles visits Lugh at Tara, he is ruling as "king of the otherworld and is attended by a young and regally dressed woman who is identified as the sovereignty of Ireland" (29).

Loomis reports that Lughnasa celebrated the marriage of the sun-god Lugh to the land of Erin (Ireland). He further comments that the time of this union was "deemed an auspicious occasion for human matings not always of a dignified or permanent nature." The spear of Lugh was a compound of lightning weapon and phallic symbol (265). Smith reports that Lugh's spear was one of the Four

Jewels of the Tuatha Dé Danaan: it "thirsted for battle and could only be kept at rest by steeping it in pounded poppy leaves." Smith concludes that Lugh is the god of lust, or that he represents desire, will, or ambition (61). Gerry says, "Give Evans a Big Chance and he won't let you down. It's only everyday life he's not so successful at" (*DAL* 31).[36]

The dual nature of Gerry's character leads to the central theme of the play. In an interview Friel has said that *Lughnasa* is about "the necessity for paganism" (Kavanagh 134). Since Friel has announced that his next play will treat the necessity for mysticism or religion, he seems to believe that these two elements deserve equal space in our lives. By paganism he seems to mean the elemental forces and instincts that must not be denied if we are to be whole personalities. One of the important statements in *Lughnasa* is Father Jack's description of the Ryangans as a remarkable people because "There is no distinction between the religious and the secular in their culture" (*DAL* 48). He seems to be referring not to the mixing of church and state that exists in Irish affairs, but to the balancing of mysticism and hedonism or earthiness represented by the opposing philosophies of Christianity and paganism. Despite Friel's comment, I believe the play goes well beyond a mere recognition of this necessity. It attempts to bring us to a reexamination of the false myths--pagan and Christian--that we cling to.

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[36]Compare Vershinin's observation in *The Three Sisters:* "We Russians are a people whose aspirations are magnificent; it's just living we can't handle." See Friel's translation 43.

In his choice of women as the focus of a play with a pagan festival as reference point, Friel alludes to the myth of Ireland as a woman. This myth begins with the Tuatha Dé Danann, "the tribes of the goddess Danu" (Smith 31, Walker 206-7). These ancient tribes may have been spirits of the dead, gods, a folk memory of a very ancient race of mortals, or the original "little people" or fairies. Their goddess is Danu, Anu, or Ana. Her breasts are still commemorated by mountains in Kerry called the "Paps of Anu."

Danu is a cognate of the Greek goddess Danae, a virgin princess impregnated by Zeus's shower of golden rain. The classical myth says that Danae was shut up in an underground room of bronze to prevent her from being seduced, and Zeus's shower of gold fell through a crack in the roof and into her womb (Grimal 10). As a result, she bore Perseus, who is therefore god-begotten and virgin-born. *Fin-de-siècle* artists depicted this golden rain as gold coins (Dijkstra 369-70), but Barbara C. Walker interprets it as urine, saying primitives equated urine with semen in its reproductive power (207). Frazer equates the golden rain with sunshine or sunbeams (ii 237).

Danae represents Mother Earth, and in being fructified by Father-Heaven's seminal rain (or sunshine), she is equivalent to the mother goddess of Ireland, whether Danu or Eriu, uniting with Lugh, the sun-god. Both are fertility symbols. Anu is the flowering virgin in the Irish trinity of goddesses usually called the Mór-rígu (or Morrigan). Badb, the mother figure, produces and sustains life; Macha, the crone, is the "Queen of Phantoms," or "Mother Death."

Although there is considerable disagreement on the roles of these various deities, most authorities agree on this general arrangement.

According to Walker, in Pre-Roman Latium, the virgin-mother-crone trinity consisted of Juventas, Juno, and Minerva, the goddess of wisdom. The Crone was associated with wisdom; it was believed that women became wise in the post-menopausal stage because they no longer shed their "wise-blood" (187). The closest counterpart to Minerva in Irish myth is Brighid, who was Christianized as Saint Brighid. MacCana believes "it is clear beyond question that the saint has usurped the role of the goddess and much of her mythological tradition" (34). She was fed by the milk of a white, red-eared cow (by Irish usage, a supernatural cow). She and her nuns guarded a sacred fire that burned perpetually and was surrounded by a hedge which no male might enter. She was associated with poetry, learning, healing, art, and craftsmanship.

The crone Macha laid the death curse on Cúchulainn, haunted battlefields, and made magic with the blood of slain men, but this personage is also sometimes the Morrigan or Badb. These goddesses are associated with war and all sometimes take the form of a raven or crow. Smith says:

> Badb means "royston crow" or "raven." The Morrigu often appears in the form of a raven. It is possible, then, that Eriu herself is yet another manifestation of the Morrigu, for she also at moments looks like a crow. (63-63)

Patrick J. Keane describes the Morrigu as "one-eyed and with the head of a crow. . . . It is she who, in Yeats's final play, *The Death of*

Cúchulainn, dances before the severed head of Ireland's and Yeats's principal hero" (x).[37]

In *Dancing at Lughnasa* Gerry is selling "Minerva Gramophones--The Wise Buy" (28). If Kate, the oldest of the sisters, represents Minerva, Macha, or the crone, the animosity between Gerry and Kate springs from her pagan as well as her Christian nature, both of which she has as Saint Brighid, the Irish equivalent of Minerva. As a schoolteacher she is associated with learning, and she is the healer of the household, bringing medicine for Chris and Father Jack, and "healing" Jack, at least temporarily. Perhaps it is her sainthood that makes it impossible for her to accept Father Jack's heresy or Gerry's "immorality." Finally, she does have a perpetual fire tended by her "sisters," and she would keep some men out--Gerry, for one.

In the episode of the "supernatural cow," which Gerry describes to Chris, he claims to have seen an ordinary brown cow with a single horn in the center of its forehead. The cow was "walking along by itself," and it winked at Gerry. He cites this as a "fabulous omen," whereas the single magpie he sees while talking to Chris is "definitely a bad omen" (*DAL* 30). This cow could be Saint Brighid's supernatural cow, although it is brown, not white with red ears. Since the Feast of Lughnasa is a harvest festival, the cow could be an embodiment of the "corn-spirit," the symbol of fertility "killed" at harvest-time to be reborn in the spring (Frazer ii 336ff.).

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[37]Keane's description is not exactly accurate. It is Emer who dances; the Morrigu says, "I arranged the dance." See Yeats *Plays*445.

Chris suggests a connection with the unicorn because of the single horn (another phallic symbol?), but Gerry cancels that explanation, saying unicorns have the body of a horse. Of course what the cow does represent is Friel's use of, but mockery of, elements of myth and superstition to which modern man still clings. The magpie fits into the same category. By its glossy black feathers and raucous voice, the magpie resembles the crow or raven, those carrion birds who frequent battlefields feeding on corpses, and who, throughout ancient folklore, are harbingers of evil and ill luck. Crows and ravens, as we have seen, are the form most often taken by the Morrigu. It is not the magpie, however, but Rose's white rooster, that takes a "lump" out of Maggie's arm (*DAL* 15).

The most comical figure in *Lughnasa* is Father Jack, who is also tragic, and sometimes, Lear-like, wise in his madness. His description of the jungle rites is both ludicrous and perceptive. The picture of the entire leper colony, drunk on palm wine and dancing for days, "many of them with misshapen limbs, with missing limbs," strikes Maggie as something she would not like to see: "A clatter of lepers trying to do the Military Two-step" (*DAL* 48-49). On the other hand, Jack observes that the Ryangans make no distinction between the religious and the secular in their culture and that they are not unlike the Irish in their "capacity for fun, for laughing, for practical jokes" and in their "open hearts" (*DAL* 48). He also surprises Kate by his easy acceptance of Michael as Chris's "love-child," something he says women are eager to have in Ryanga (40-41). Confused and out-of-touch with the life going on around him, he

shuffles through the play in a variety of ill-fitting, inappropriate costumes. In Act II Friel directs, "His dress looks now even more bizarre." In the final scene he enters wearing the white uniform he wore in the first tableau, now soiled, crumpled, and worn.

His appearance links him with the Celtic god Daghdha or Dagda, "depicted as a gross buffoon of enormous strength and enormous capacity, clad in the short tunic that in Ireland is the normal costume of a churl" (Smith 56). MacCana says, "The Daghdha provides a striking instance of the ancient tendency to treat gods and father-figures as objects of fun and ridicule" (66). In one episode the Dagda's enemies challenge him on pain of death to eat a stupendous porridge they have prepared for him. He swallows it all and even scrapes the bowl with his fingers. The Dagda is "the nearest thing the Irish have to a universal god, though he was often subordinate to Lugh" (Chadwick 173). His name means "good god" or "good father," not good in the moral sense, but "good at everything" (Chadwick 170). The Dagda's alternate name, *Ruad Ro-fhessa,* means "Lord of Great Knowledge." Father Jack, though not fitting exactly into the descriptions of the Dagda, is a "father" who is both wise and ridiculous.

In making sport of the gods and goddesses and their myths, Friel joins Irish tradition. Discussing Gaelic comic genius, Vivian Mercier speaks of the ambivalence with which the Gaelic writer views his archaic heritage: "like Homer or Aristophanes, he seems to believe in myth and magic with one half of his being, while with the other half he delights in their absurdity" (8). Commenting on the

"play-spirit" of the primitive society, Mercier cites Johan Huizinga's theory that "primitive man is not nearly so implicit a believer in his own rituals as civilized man tends to think him."[38] Mercier continues:

> Behind the bards and the hagiographers, who endlessly strive to outdo each other in their accounts of heroic deeds and saintly miracles, there lurks the figure of the sceptic and/or parodist. Anyone who knows the contradictions of the Irish mind may come to suspect that the sceptical parodist is but the bard or the hagiographer himself in a different mood. (13)

Friel clearly has tradition behind him in the technique of dual purpose and conflicting tone that he uses so effectively in *Dancing at Lughnasa.* He treats an essentially tragic situation with lively wit and humor, creating an irony that drives home the seriousness. Friel also handles with a light touch the allusions to Irish mythology--a potentially volatile subject.

Myths grow out of a necessity to explain or come to terms with a given set of circumstances. In this capacity, they are beneficial and necessary. When the circumstances change and the need no longer exists, the myths can be detrimental if they continue to control us. In Chapter VII we have seen Friel's treatment of the landscape in which we are trapped by language even when its contours have changed. In *Lughnasa* Friel turns to the landscape we are trapped in by our myths.

When a myth, instead of growing naturally out of the impulses of a primitive people, has been imposed by calculating minds, as

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[38]Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston, 1955) 23, qtd. in Mercier 9.

sometimes happens in societies controlled by authoritarian forces either outside or inside the society's structure, the myth can be doubly dangerous. The electronic media, for example, whether in the hands of political forces, big business, private enterprise, or humanitarian groups, has the power to create through advertising and propagandistic devices certain myths in the public mind, which may be beneficial or may ultimately be very dangerous.

It is easy to understand how the concerted efforts of Ireland's writers and political activists during the early days of the century could create certain myths that seemed at the time advantageous to the cause of a united Ireland, but are today proving detrimental. In the first Irish Renaissance, Yeats, Synge, Lady Gregory, and many others saw their task to be the building of an Irish identity. They took the native materials of Irish culture and history--many of which were not familiar to most of them because these writers were Anglo-Irish, not Celtic--mastered them, and set out to build a national image, a cultural pride, which the Irish sorely needed. James Joyce's autobiographical *persona* Stephen Dedalus sets out "to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race" (*Portrait* 253). Perhaps they did their job too well. Perhaps the myth was there and would have taken hold without them. This myth centers on the image of Ireland as the "Devouring Female" or the "Terrible Mother," and has a firm hold on the Irish imagination.

In *Faith Healer* we have seen Ireland as the Leanhaun Shee or *la belle dame sans merci,* related to the Kali-Ma, the Hindu goddess who both gives life and takes it. In *Dancing at Lughnasa,* we see

Ireland as the fertility goddess and as the goddess of wisdom Christianized as Saint Brighid. We have seen the crone, or the Morrigan, haunting battlefields as the raven or vulture, hungry for men's blood. In his book *Terrible Beauty: Yeats, Joyce, Ireland and the Myth of the Devouring Female,* Patrick J. Keane links these images with the Sheila-na-gig. Sheila-na-gigs were grotesque stone carvings common in Irish (and some English) castles and churches built before the sixteenth century. Most of these statues were still in place until the Victorian era, when they were removed or destroyed, sometimes being buried near the churches they had adorned. Keane sees the Sheila-na-gig as "negative, destructive" (x). In support he cites Seamus Heaney's poem "Sheelagh na Gig," in which, according to Keane, she is a "grotesque devourer" (x).[39]

Mercier considers the Sheila-na-gig symbolic of Irish attitudes toward death and sex. He reports that the sixty or seventy Sheilas existing in Ireland in 1936 all had in common "either grossly exaggerated genitalia or a posture which directs attention to the genitalia"--usually a combination of both, as well as "an ugly mask-like or skull-like face, with a huge, scowling mouth; [and] skeletal ribs." Mercier relates Sheila-na-gigs to the Irish tendency to treat sex and death as grotesque and macabre.

Keane argues that this "Terrible Mother" is the central figure in the "lethal political mythology of modern Ireland," and that these female images coalesce in Yeats's heroine in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*:

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[39]Seamus Heaney, *Station Island* (New York: Farrar, 1985) 49, qtd. in Keane ix.

"the Old Woman rejuvenated by the blood of young men she lures into battle, and played on stage by Yeats's own *femme fatale* and destructive Helen of Troy, Maud Gonne" (xii). Keane cites evidence of the tremendous influence the play has had. He believes that Yeats violated his dictum that drama should not have an "obvious patriotic intention" in order to appease *his* devouring muse, Maud Gonne. In the character of Cathleen, Yeats created a Shan Van Vocht or "Poor Old Woman"--the image of Ireland that lured young men to their death and continues to do so today (5-13). When offered milk, oaten cake, or money, she says, "It is not food or drink that I want. . . . It is not silver I want. . . . If anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all" (Yeats 55).

Michael, the young man in Yeats's play, leaves his home, his bride-to-be, and any hope of earthly success to die for love of the Old Woman. In the play's memorable last line, the Old Woman is transformed. Michael's brother Patrick reports that he did not see an old woman, but "a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen" (Yeats 57). This transformation takes place off-stage with the implication that the old crone who is Ireland has become a young woman, "rejuvenated by the prospect of fresh blood, by an infusion from those who, seduced from their marriage beds, [will] die for love of her" (Keane 16). In the presentation of the play, directed by Yeats, Maud Gonne revealed to the audience for one brief closing instant, despite the rags and make-up of the Old Woman, a glimpse of the beauty they all knew she possessed. Thus, as John Rees Moore says, "Patriotism was invested with all the excitement of a sexual

seduction so safely decent that not even the most respectable guardian of the Irish image could impute sinister or scandalous motives to it" (14).

Keane imputes to *Cathleen ni Houlihan* the burden of Romantic Ireland's myth, and cites lines from Yeats's poetry as evidence that Yeats himself believed he had caused bloodshed. In "Easter 1916" Yeats asks, "What if excess of love / Bewildered them till they died?" In "The Man and the Echo," written shortly before his death, he asks specifically, "Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?" (*Poems* 180-82, 345).

The procession of female personifications in Irish literature, however, did not originate with Yeats. Thomas O'Grady says the "litany of female figures resurrected from the Gaelic folk tradition" by writers of the Irish literary revival provided Joyce and the next half generation of Irish writers with an image of Ireland to be challenged. O'Grady cites Sean O'Casey's words: "For the first time in his life, Sean felt a surge of hatred for Cathleen ni Houlihan sweeping over him. He saw now that the one who had the walk of a queen could be a bitch at times."[40] Denis Johnston in his play *The Old Lady Says "No!"* "transforms the ageless Cathleen ni Houlihan . . . into an aged *sheela-na-gig* of horrifying proportions" (O'Grady 71).

In 1972 Friel wrote:

> I can foresee that the two allegiances that have bound the Irish imagination--loyalty to the most authoritarian church in the world and devotion to a romantic ideal we call Kathleen--will be radically altered. Faith and Fatherland; new

[40]*Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well* in *Autobiographies* (London: Pan Books, 1980) 2:150.

> definitions will be forged, and then new loyalties, and then new social groupings. It will be a bloody process. ("Plays Peasant" 306)

Maire Cruise O'Brien has observed that it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between Church and Nation in the Irish folk mind. "The two personifications [Church and Nation], erstwhile mistrustful of each other, could be reconciled as one." Efforts were made even before 1916 to "impress on the rank-and-file that Eire, or mother Ireland, or Cathleen Ní Houlihan, or whatever, was a pagan deity and that devotion lavished on her was idolatry." These efforts have failed, according to O'Brien, for she is with us yet. "Not only did she have her poets; she had her blood-sacrifice as well. She has been demanding more of the same ever since."[41] These few examples of the many that could be given are enough to show how firmly lodged this myth is in the Irish consciousness.

Separating people from their illusions, from the fictions they build into their lives, is not a simple matter. Friel has shown this repeatedly in his plays. To separate a nation from its image of itself--to dislodge the myth it lives by--is a matter for extreme caution. If a nation loses faith in the image it has of itself, if it loses its vision of the future, it will be left floundering, with no direction and with a hollow core that is vulnerable to radical ideologies. But if its national myth demands that it sacrifice its sons and daughters for causes that are false or needless, that it

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[41]Maire Cruise O'Brien, "The Female Principle in Gaelic Poetry," *Woman in Irish Legend, Life and Literature,* ed. S. F. Gallagher (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe; Totowa: Barnes, 1983) 26-37 (36), qtd. in Keane 2.

spill its blood in struggles that accomplish nothing, it needs to reexamine that myth. After more than half a century of attempts by writers to controvert the image of Ireland as nurturing female, it seems stronger than ever. Keane believes that "for all his demythologizing, Joyce never fully escapes the myth of Cathleen and Romantic Ireland" (3). Efforts to confront the image with the negative aspects of the "Terrible Mother" merely serve to strengthen the place the myth has in the Irish imagination because the myth is so constructed that the positive and negative elements are equally necessary and functional. In 1976 Conor Cruise O'Brien urged students at University College Dublin to "transcend" the myth of Romantic Ireland. Denis Donoghue has criticized this view, claiming it leaves behind not only Irish myth but Irish reality and "offers us life without passion" (22, 153-55).[42]

In *Dancing at Lughnasa,* Friel focuses on myths and rituals. He shows them as potentially beneficial and potentially dangerous. He presents women as people, not as goddesses or symbols. When there are parallels, the reality overrides the myth, revealing it as fantasy or folly. His allusions to the mythological proportions the image of Ireland as woman has attained in the Irish imagination are consistently undercut by both his humorous treatment of the sexuality of his women characters and his serious, realistic presentation of the problems they face in their day-to-day existence. For example, the "hunger" Maggie and, to a lesser extent, all the sisters express for a man, which I have called a "healthy"

[42]See also Flanagan 46-48.

interest in sex, may just as well represent in a comic vein the hunger of the "Devouring Female." The lively dance the sisters perform, which forms the central action of the play, is initiated by Maggie, who "pushes her hair back from her face, pulls her hands [that are covered with flour] down her cheeks and patterns her face with an instant mask" (*DAL* 21). Perhaps Friel means to suggest a connection between Maggie and the Morrigu who arranges the dance before the severed head of Cúchulainn at the end of Yeats's play *The Death of Cúchulainn.* In saying "I arranged the dance" the Morrigu refers to the dance of life and death. It is Emer who performs the dance, and the dance of Kate more resembles the dance of Emer than does the lively dance the other sisters perform. In *Lughnasa* the dance is a humorous episode, but it serves a serious and ritualistic purpose, concerning matters of life and death.

Susan Bordo, Peter Gay, Bram Dijkstra, and others have referred to the "theme of female oral insatiability," a theme particularly prevalent in the nineteenth century and related to vampirism, to the severed head of John the Baptist so common as a subject in *fin de siècle* art, to the severed head of Cúchulainn in *The Death of Cúchulainn,* and to Heaney's "mouth devouring heads" in his "Sheelagh na Gig" poem.[43] Friel alludes to this theme in *Lughnasa* with his constant references to Maggie's need for cigarettes, which she twice relates to men, and in the scene in which Rose, returning from her tryst with Barney "up in the hills," stops to cram a handful of freshly picked bilberries into her mouth,

[43]See Keane 19-20.

leaving her face and hands dripping and her skirt smeared with blood-red juice (*DAL* 56-57).

Friel further subverts the myth of Ireland as a *femme fatale* in his treatment of Gerry, Chris, and Agnes. In these relationships, Gerry, not Chris or Agnes, is the tempter. The women have minds of their own and are strong characters, but in no sense are they seductresses, devouring females, or Sheila-na-Gigs.

In Friel's short stories the mother regularly appears as a warm, sustaining, controlling, often authoritarian, character. With Friel's shift to drama, the mother figure drops conspicuously from the scene. In every play that involves a family, up to *Dancing at Lughnasa,* the mother exists only as a shadowy memory--as a fiction that lives in the minds of her children or a symbol of some early romantic period in the life of the father. The father is at the center of the conflict in every play. In *Lughnasa* the mother reenters the world of Friel's plays, but in an unusual form. To the young Michael, all the Glenties sisters are mother-figures, but the single mother-figure as that intense emotional center of a child's two-fold impulse of love and guilt is absent. By fragmenting this image into five very real and different people, Friel presents the atmosphere of warmth, comfort, and relative stability that a home provides a small child, and also shows the dissolution of the home and the breaking of ties by the young person without the overriding sense of guilt found so often in Irish writers, as, for example, in Stephen Dedalus's torments in *Ulysses.*

Thus, Friel alludes to the image of Ireland as Terrible Mother with a disarming comic realism that explodes the emotional grasp the myth has on the Irish imagination. He does so without directly confronting or denying the myth as a potent factor in Irish nationalism. Friel has thereby discovered the best, if not the only, way to deal with the myths that control the Irish consciousness. If these myths can be seen for what they are and can be "de-fused" with an appeal to the comic-realistic side of Irish nature, the fanatical devotion to them can be broken without destroying the pride in Irish identity that has been so carefully built and is so important to an emerging nation. Confronting these myths directly can only result in undermining this pride or in a stronger fanaticism, both of which are highly undesirable.

Rituals

Up to now this discussion of *Dancing at Lughnasa* has centered on Friel's use of Ireland's socio-economic history and his attitude toward the myths that have moved from the realm of ancient culture into that of contemporary politics. In *Lughnasa* Friel also has a lot to say about ritual. Katherine Burkman distinguishes between myth and ritual, both of which are "symbolic procedures," by describing myth as "a system of word symbols" and ritual as "a system of object and act symbols." Mythology, then, is a "rationalization of the same human needs that ritual as an obsessive repetitive activity dramatizes" (14). In *Lughnasa* Friel allows us to encounter ritual in three forms: as primitive pagan ceremonies involving sacrifice, as

contemporary customs growing out of emotional or physical needs, and as drama.

Father Jack's Ryangan ceremonies are not presented on stage, but they are described by him in detail (*DAL* 39, 47-48, 48-69). He says: "That's what we do in Ryanga when we want to please the spirits--or to appease them; we kill a rooster or a young goat. . . . You have a ritual killing. You offer up sacrifice. You have dancing and incantations" (*DAL* 39). The pagan practices from the ancient Celtic Lughnasa that are still observed "up in the hills" are not seen on stage, but they are pointedly mentioned by Rose and Kate, with the former accepting them in a matter-of-fact way and the latter denouncing them as evil.

Yet the sisters have their own Lughnasa rituals. They pick bilberries, and when Father Jack is reminded that he used to gather bilberries in his youth, he says: "Mother and myself; every Lughnasa; the annual ritual. Of course I remember. And then she'd make the most wonderful jam" (*DAL* 46). They eat their "Eggs Ballybeg *al fresco,*" with Maggie commenting, "Lughnasa's almost over, girls. There aren't going to be many warm evenings left" (*DAL* 66). And they talk with great interest about the annual harvest dance. In fact, their realization that they have become too old and too proper to attend the dance prompts them to engage in their own primitive dance ritual. Michael's kites, too, represent pagan idols created for Lughnasa. The wireless radio set "Marconi" becomes a kind of household god that the sisters alternately curse for its temperamental behavior and appease with attention and new

batteries. Marconi exercises a mysterious control over the action of the play. When it "speaks," someone dances; when it suddenly goes silent, the dancing ceases. Chris refers to it as "possessed." Friel shows how easily the routines of life take on the form of ritual.

When Father Jack further describes the Ryangan festival, he explains how religious ritual grows into secular celebration, and comments (as noted earlier) that with the Ryangans "there is no distinction between the religious and the secular in their culture" (*DAL* 48). In this statement Friel comments on how ritual can give the secular activities of our lives meaning and how that meaning can take on religious significance and become myth. In commenting on *Myth and Ritual in the Plays of Samuel Beckett,* Burkman observes that habit may be "a great deadener," but when it fails to deaden, as in Beckett's plays, it takes on a ritual aspect. It may be an evasive tactic used by the characters to deaden their suffering, but it may also be "a *façon,* a way to get on" (13-14). In *Lughnasa* Friel demonstrates both of these uses.

The repetition of certain activities establishes a continuity in our lives. When Kate starts Father Jack on a regimen of daily walks, more than the exercise and fresh air facilitates his recovery. At one point he says, "If anybody is looking for me, I'll be down at the bank of the river for the rest of the . . ." (*DAL* 38). Suddenly realizing where he is, he stops. (There is no river near the Mundy home in Donegal.) His words show how he is still relying on the daily rituals of his life in Uganda and how the routines of his life have been disrupted. The daily ritual Kate sets up for him restores the sense

of connection, of purpose, that he has lost by being suddenly displaced. In a similar way, the routines of daily life serve to give the sisters a sense of continuity and stability in a life that has little real stability. These daily rituals also help them overlook the deprivations and frustrations of their lives. The ritual of making tea every evening hides the fact that they have very little to eat--three eggs and caraway-seed bread for eight people at one meal, two tomatoes and some soda bread at another. The routines of ironing, cleaning, feeding chickens, and knitting, though monotonous in themselves, help relieve the greater problems of boredom and disappointment.

We have seen how the ritual nature of a dance relieves the disappointment of not being able to attend the harvest dance. When Maggie initiates the dance, she is dancing away her disappointment over the discovery that her school friend is doing so much better than she; the dance deadens the anguish and sense of loss she feels over dreams deferred. The dance Chris and Gerry perform together serves a different purpose. Michael describes it:

> And although my mother and he didn't go through a conventional form of marriage, once more they danced together. . . . And this time it was a dance without music; just there, in ritual circles round and round that square and then down the lane and back up again; slowly, formally, with easy deliberation. My mother with her head thrown back, her eyes closed, her mouth slightly open. . . . No singing, no melody, no words. Only the swish and whisper of their feet across the grass. (*DAL* 42)

Friel has explored the wide range of ritual in our lives. The greater purpose of these ritualistic activities in *Lughnasa* is to involve

audiences in the ritual of drama so that for the duration of the play they are susceptible to the ideas Friel puts forth.

Sacrifices

Dancing at Lughnasa contains an undercurrent of primitive, irrational emotions. It presents problems that are solved *without* words, connections that are made *without* language. It presents images of sacrifice to alert us to other more serious sacrifices. Father Jack has practiced animal sacrifice in Ryanga. As a result, it is he who is sacrificed. Having spent his life serving among the lepers, he returns to become a "leper" in his native society, outcast because his experiences have led him to a broader view of human needs than the limited view of the Catholic church which controls his home parish in Ireland. Of course Friel does not advocate animal sacrifice any more than he advocates human sacrifice. The boy who falls into the fire up in the hills where the people were "doing some devilish thing with a goat--some sort of sacrifice for the Lughnasa Festival" (*DAL* 35)--recovers from his burns and does not become a human sacrifice to Lugh. Father Jack's death is sad, especially to Kate who "was inconsolable" for months, apparently because she has not been able to accept her rationalization for his pagan ways: "Jack must make his own distinctive search" (*DAL* 60). His tragedy, however, is not in his death but in his fragmented mind when he tries to reconcile the two divergent languages and ways of life with which he is confronted. Thus he is a metaphor for Ireland, trying to hold two divergent ways of life in its collective mind and not

succeeding any more than Father Jack. Is Friel saying one of the views must be sacrificed? Or is it possible to reconcile them?

The play contains reconciliations, but it contains sacrifices as well. If Gerry is the pagan god Lugh, and Chris, whose full name is Christina, is the female Christ-figure, it seems that pagan and Christian are reconciled in the ritual dance without music, after which Chris, no longer depressed over Gerry's departure, grieves for him "as any bride would grieve" (*DAL* 42). The wild ritualistic dance in which all five sisters participate heals the rift among the sisters over whether to go to the harvest dance. The only "sacrifice" we see on the stage is the bringing in of Rose's dead rooster. Rose lays the carcass ceremonially in the middle of the tablecloth spread on the ground for the *al fresco* supper. Friel says, "Rose is calm, almost matter-of-fact" as she brings in the dead rooster and announces that "The fox must have got him" (*DAL* 67). The fox has left the dead rooster unharmed except for some blood and ruffled feathers (uncharacteristic of a fox), and the other chickens were not harmed. Did Father Jack revert to his pagan ways and sacrifice the rooster? He has mentioned a rooster as one of the animals they kill in the ceremonies in Ryanga. Did Rose kill the rooster, or does she subconsciously accept its death, as a symbolic sacrifice of her youth, her love, her virginity, even her life? Did Maggie kill him as she has threatened to do? We are left to wonder.

The real sacrificial victims in *Lughnasa* are Agnes and Rose whose lives are sacrificed to the social and religious conditions prevailing in rural Ireland that take away their means of livelihood,

forcing them to a destitute existence and final dehumanizing death in London. *Lughnasa* focuses on a society in which women are reduced to poverty-level existence, denied normal fulfillment through marriage, children, secure employment or status in the community, and at the same time mythologized as goddesses--either as pure, holy, perfect, and entirely virtuous representatives of church and nation, or as Shan Van Vocht or Sheila-na-gig, *femme fatales*, luring men to evil and death. Women are the sacrificial victims in this fragmented society which insists on rigid pieties but ignores normal human needs.

Conclusions

Dancing at Lughnasa undercuts the ancient myths of Ireland and forces us to take a hard look at the reality of contemporary Ireland. It does this in the context of a ritual drama in which the members of the audience are firmly caught up in the communal experience so that they are fully receptive to the ideas Friel is presenting. In his review of the performance of the play at the Abbey Theatre, S. F. Gallagher reports of the dance scene involving the five sisters: "this episode entranced the members of the Abbey audience, leaving them as breathless as the dancers" (12).

Gerry's ironic overturning of the heroic qualities of the god Lugh undercuts the Lughnasa myth. If Father Jack represents the father god Dagda, he is shown in the ridiculous fashion typical for father figures, further undercutting any heroism he might possess. Finally, the devouring female myth of Mother Ireland is thoroughly

undercut. If Maggie is the Morrigu figure, arranging the dance, she is at best a droll, ineffectual Morrigu. The other sisters are the tempted rather than the temptresses.

Cúchulainn does not die except as the childhood memory of Michael. Perhaps the strongest sense of loss occurs here. Through the divided character of Michael, Friel shows that the world of childhood--of memory--is only an illusion, a fiction unrelated to fact. The reality is that the past must be sacrificed. Ireland must move to grasp the hard-won epiphany of the future: a unity that accepts diversity and relinquishes past illusions. That is the message of the play and of all Friel's work.

And yet, is that all the message? Surely the memory of that illusion is what lingers after the play and goes with the audience from the theatre. Michael's closing words are:

> When I remember it, I think of it as dancing. Dancing with eyes half closed because to open them would break the spell. Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement--as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness. Dancing as if the very heart of life and all its hopes might be found in those assuaging notes and those hushed rhythms and in those silent and hypnotic movements. Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary . . . . (*DAL* 71)

In his characteristic ambiguity, Friel tantalizes us with the idea that we can leave the past behind but take it with us too. We can return to the days before the struggle, to the mystic Eden of pagan Ireland where we were "in touch with some otherness" and could

dance "into the very heart of life" (*DAL* 71). Or perhaps we can take this greater awareness, this sensitivity, into the future where language will be the communion of consciousnesses and not the barrier it has become between individuals.

In this final ambiguity and in his suggestion of reaching toward some meaning that can be grasped only through a mystical ritual, Friel comes close to Yeats's ideas in his poem "Among School Children":

> O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
> Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
> O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
> How can we know the dancer from the dance? (*Poems* 217)

Yeats suggests that some ultimate reality exists but all we can apprehend is the outward appearance. Thus, we must structure our world from the images we create, never being sure whether they represent the essence of reality or only an illusion.

Earlier in the poem Yeats has mentioned Plato's parable of the egg, alluding to Aristophanes argument in Plato's *Symposium* that primal man was double in a nearly spherical or egg-like shape. Zeus divided him in two, as a cooked egg divided by a hair. Love or sexual union are seen as an attempt to regain that lost unity. Friel's use of the dance of Chris and Gerry as a kind of marriage ceremony or symbol of unity carries the same suggestion in the play as the parable of the egg does in Yeats's poem--the suggestion that dance and rituals may achieve unity within the divided selves that exist in each of us, a union of body and soul.

The frenzied dance of the five sisters that forms the central image of the play provides a ritual healing, not only of the tensions between them, but also of each sister's inner conflicts, making each one whole. In the concluding scene, as the characters sway ever so slightly to music, Friel achieves a similar union. His stage directions read: *"The movement is so minimal that we cannot be quite certain if it is happening or if we imagine it"* (*DAL* 71). This final mesmerizing scene, accompanied by Michael's last memory, achieves a remarkable of unity of stage and audience, a true communication without words.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS: THE IRISH THEATRE OF BRIAN FRIEL

In *The London Vertigo* (1990) Friel resurrects an eighteenth-century farce, *The True Born Irishman* or *The Irish Fine Lady* by Charles Macklin. In his introduction entitled "MacLochlainn's Vertigo," Friel discusses his choice of this play for adaptation. Charles Macklin was born Cathal MacLochlainn in Gortanarin on the Inishowen peninsula, near where Friel presently lives. His birth was during the last decade of the seventeenth century--probably 1690, 1693, or 1699; he never clarified this confusion. As an Irish-speaking Catholic peasant from north Donegal, he realized he "did not possess the very best qualifications for success in eighteenth century Ireland" (9).

While still a boy, Macklin embarked on a "transmogrification" of himself. He emigrated to England, learned to speak English with an English accent, changed his name, converted to Protestantism, invented a wealthy, landed background, and became a great success as a playwright and actor on the English stage. He was a friend of David Garrick, Edmund Burke, and Henry Fielding. Pope praised him for his portrayal of Shylock: "This is the Jew / That Shakespeare drew" (qtd. in Friel 10). He became famous for his roles as Macbeth and Iago and for two highly successful plays, *The Man of the World* and *Love à la Mode.* When he was in his sixties, Macklin wrote *The True Born Irishman,* his first play with an Irish theme, in which he

writes "out of a discarded persona," and "almost certainly unwittingly . . . has written his own biography as comedy/farce" (10-11).

The play, a satirical look at Irish Anglophiles, concerns Nancy O'Doherty, wife of a "pompous and ponderous Dublin burgher" (played by Macklin himself), who returns from a visit to London smitten with "the London vertigo," a dizzy conviction that London is the center of style, wit, good fortune, and excitement. Macklin paints her as an absurd and ludicrous figure who has changed her name to Mrs. Diggerty. In a posh accent she ridicules everything Irish, professing to prefer the *"non chalance* and *jenny see quee"* of London. Through the complicated and cruel maneuvers of her husband, she is finally cured of her vertigo, humiliated before her friends, and reconciled to decent Dublin domesticity. The play was received warmly by Irish audiences, but its London opening six years later was a disaster, causing Macklin to rush on stage after the final curtain and apologize to his audience. Later he commented, "There is a geography in humour as well as in morals, which I had previously not considered" (qtd. in Friel 11).

Friel says he worked on Macklin's text "with affection and respect" (11). His interest must surely have been piqued by a number of factors: the contemplation of a person who actually does change his image--"metamorphose" himself--as Friel says actors and middle-age writers dream of doing; the affinity he feels with a fellow Ulsterman, a "neighboring playwright"; and the example Macklin affords of the common Irish problem of expatriation--a

problem Friel has faced and still faces. Though he has chosen to remain in Ireland and write for Irish audiences, he must seek not only an English audience but an American and international audience if he is to be an important dramatist. For centuries this fact has led Irish dramatists to emigrate.

Most of the important "English" dramatists prior to the last fifty or sixty years, with the exception of Shakespeare, have been Irish. The list includes Farquhar, Steele, Congreve, Sheridan, Goldsmith, Wilde, and Shaw, and seems to indicate a particular talent among the Irish for playwriting. Writing in 1972, however, Friel ruled these playwrights out of Irish theatre because they wrote for the English stage and within the English tradition:

> It is high time we dropped from the calendar of Irish dramatic saints all those playwrights from Farquhar to Shaw . . . who no more belong to Irish drama than John Field belongs to Irish music or Francis Bacon to Irish painting. ("Plays Peasant" 304).

Irish drama was born on May 8, 1899, when the Irish Literary Theatre opened its doors. It "includes plays written in Irish or English on Irish subjects and performed by Irishmen" (Friel "Plays Peasant" 304).

This Irish theatre, which became the Abbey Theatre, was founded by Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Edward Martyn, three representatives of what is loosely known as the 'Anglo-Irish ascendancy.' As Christopher Fitz-Simon observes, it is curious that they "should have been responsible for the foundation of a theatre

which . . . would express the spirit of an Ireland quite different from that known to other members of their social class" (134). Friel points out that Yeats says he had set out to create "an unpopular theatre where admission is by favour and never to many" and discovered to his dismay that he had created a "true People's Theatre."[44] The Irish theatre has produced two giants of the dramatic world, John Synge and Sean O'Casey, and has seen more riots in its ninety-three years than the English theatre has seen in eight hundred years.

Friel believes the riots indicate that the Irish people in the first quarter of this century "brought to the theatre a high seriousness as worthy in its own way as the seriousness of the playwrights," and showed that they recognized that theatre "not only reflected but shaped the society it served" ("Plays Peasant" 304). Following this tradition, Friel has tried to see that Irish drama reaches as many Irish people as possible. He has worked to accomplish that aim through the Field Day Theatre Company.

In a 1980 interview, Friel said that Irish dramatists, excluding Synge, but "particularly someone like Behan," have "pitched their voice for English acceptance and recognition." He thinks this is changing, that "there is some kind of confidence, some kind of coming together of Irish dramatists. . . . We are talking to ourselves as we must and if we are overheard in America, or England, so much the better."[45] Friel's success in the twelve years since this

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[44]Friel quotes from Yeats in "Plays Peasant and Unpeasant" 304.

[45]Qtd. in Dantanus 168. The interview with Paddy Agnew was printed in "Talking to Ourselves," *Magill* Dec. 1980: 59-61.

statement proves that Irish dramatists are being overheard in the rest of the world. Thus, the schizophrenic nature of Friel's own position emerges. Although he will surely rank with the great dramatists of the world, he would ally himself today with those who qualify as Irish playwrights. His plays on Irish subjects are performed first by Irish actors. He sees himself as speaking first to the Irish people, but secondly, he speaks to the world, and the importance of his voice in international drama can no longer be ignored by himself or his audiences.

Although Friel is not alone as an important contemporary Irish dramatist, he has emerged as a kind of father-figure or elder statesman in Irish theatre circles. Hugh Leonard's *Da,* also a Tony winner, "owes much to *Philadelphia* in its treatment of dialogue between father and son" (Pine 199). Stewart Parker, Thomas Kilroy, Tom Paulin, and Derek Mahon have all had plays produced by Field Day, and in Chapter II we saw Kilroy's statement of the debt he owes to Friel and the theatre company. When an actor in one of Friel's plays recently received an award in Ireland, his acceptance speech was simply, "Thank God for Brian Friel!" This incident illustrates the important position and the affection Friel enjoys today in Ireland. As his plays reach a wider audience and receive more attention in literary circles, that evaluation and appreciation are sure to grow.

The theatre of Brian Friel affords an understanding of Ireland unavailable from reading Irish history, sociology, or mythology. His plays reveal how an Irishman thinks and what he feels strongly

about. He sees the Irish mind divided between a "passion for the land" and a "paranoiac individualism" ("Plays Peasant" 304). This study of Friel's work has shown him digging deeper and deeper into the Irish personality, exposing the hidden, unrecognized causes of Ireland's problems. The sense of failure and inadequacy that has haunted the Irish from at least as far back as the Flight of the Earls is balanced by a strong faith in a combination of pagan and Christian beliefs. The background of trouble and failure joined with this faith inspires a dauntless determination to survive and prevail in the face of overwhelming difficulties.

Friel's early plays--*The Enemy Within, Philadelphia, Here I Come!, The Loves of Cass McGuire, Lovers,* and *Crystal and Fox*--show the deep schizophrenia that exists in the Irish mind--the conflicts between paganism and Christianity, authority and freedom, love and treachery, illusion and reality. The most successful of these plays, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!,* with its brilliant technical device of two actors playing one character, reveals clearly the split in that character's psyche between family loyalty and the demands of his emerging individuality. Friel might have chosen to repeat the successful structure of this first hit, as many playwrights have done when they have written a Broadway success. He might well have continued to create plays according to this formula, combining the pathos of lost or uncommunicated love and unfulfilled desires with the attractive but uncertain promise offered by a change of place--an escape from unpleasant realities into illusions that promise to become another set of equally unpleasant realities. He

might have made the tragicomic sentiment of this play his stock-in-trade and produced a number of quick Broadway "successes," which would now seem somewhat dated, as we must admit *Philadelphia* does, in spite of its continued appeal to audiences. It remains a great play, but its greatness is eclipsed by the amazing textual complexity, thematic density, and superb character creations of Friel's recent plays.

Instead of resting on the laurels of any one play, Friel has constantly tested himself against new and increasingly complicated challenges, never allowing himself to repeat a successful solution to a dramatic problem, wisely realizing that the only path to growth lies through struggle. Unlike Frank Hardy in *Faith Healer,* Friel has never renounced chance because, as he shows in that play, to renounce chance is to die. While his plays may treat similar themes, reading or seeing them is like turning a diamond to examine each facet for possible flaws and beauty: each facet is a different view of the theme.

Thus, we see Friel moving away from the sentiment of the early plays into a new tone of anger and repudiation that begins in *Crystal and Fox* and culminates in *Volunteers.* This new direction that appears in *Losers* and spills over into *Living Quarters* is most apparent in *The Mundy Scheme, The Gentle Island,* and *The Freedom of the City.* It is replaced by a more mature attitude of acceptance, but not necessarily approval, of man's weaknesses and the cruel fate that may await him. This last stage begins to emerge in *Living Quarters,* reaches a zenith in *Faith Healer,* and continues in

Aristocrats, Making History, and *Dancing at Lughnasa.* In its satirical form it appears in *The Communication Cord.* His new voice of confidence and strength, which enunciates the tragedy of human existence while sounding a note of triumph in the fact that man is able to endure his suffering and be ennobled by it, can be heard in all Friel's later plays.

While this brief summary reveals the coherence and progression of Friel's works, it belies his marvelous versatility. No play repeats another play in theme, technique, style, plot, or conclusion. While echoes occur from play to play in one or another of these aspects, each play is new and surprising. Each offers fresh insights into the universal problems of humankind.

Being so thoroughly Irish in context and tone, Friel's works are bound to bear strong affinities with the works of Yeats, Synge, and O'Casey. Yet, although we have seen certain comparisons in this study, I hope it has been apparent that Friel's voice is indisputably his own. No play of Friel's could ever be confused with any play of these three dramatists, no matter how much he may draw on the same culture they do. Friel sees Ireland from a different viewpoint. He is not only a Northern Irish Catholic, as they were not, but he is also intensely aware of the changes that have taken place in the world and Ireland's place in it since they wrote. His work reflects recent linguistic, anthropological, cultural, political, and sociological thinking.

Like Synge, Friel has turned to the west of Ireland for his settings, a natural direction for him since it is his home (unlike

Synge). He has found there the same sense of rootedness and simplicity that Synge found, but Friel has been more attuned to the encroachment of the modern world with the accompanying erosion of ancient ways and the inevitable conflict that follows. Although Synge's Christy Mahon, who temporarily transforms the life of the Mayo community he enters, represents this encroachment, Friel's "outsiders"--Shane in *The Gentle Island,* Skinner in *The Freedom of the City,* Keeney in *Volunteers,* Ben in *Living Quarters,* Eamon in *Aristocrats,* and Yolland in *Translations*--represent a greater and more permanent encroachment. Theirs are the displaced voices, aware of the schisms of change, yet powerless to prevent their effects.

Like Friel, Synge was interested in the way people create images and live in a world of their own creation. Synge also explored the clash between reality and illusion that fascinates Friel. Christy Mahon re-creates himself, building an entirely new image and becoming that image. In Synge's plays, as in Friel's, reality is highly relative and is constantly being mixed with fantasy and satire. In Chapter III we have seen how Synge presented the father-son conflict as a metaphor for Ireland's relationship with England, the same metaphorical relationship Friel develops with such skill, expanding it to the universal conflict between authority and freedom. Synge and Friel share an interest in retaining the influence the ancient Gaelic language has had on modern Irish English. Synge's interest, however, was in the poetic quality the Gaelic language

could add to his English writing, rather than in preserving the Irishness of the language that is actually spoken in most of Ireland, as Friel does.

In their use of the Deirdre legend, Yeats, Synge, and Friel recognize that the perspective of Celtic mythology aids in disengaging the conflicts of their plays not only from the immediate concerns of their day, but also from history--a disengagement "achieved by the constant relocation of the specific sequence of incidents in the frame of the universal, human condition" (Deane *Celtic Revivals* 55). One of the traits that places Friel squarely in the tradition of Yeats and Synge is this ability to universalize his themes.

In his political themes, in his ability to create realistic characters, in his ambiguity and sense of loss, Friel may seem on the surface to be closer to O'Casey. Like Synge and Friel, O'Casey used an Irish English in his plays, but his dialect is completely different from either of theirs. O'Casey's plays, like Synge's, caused riots and provoked controversy, so much so that they were rejected by the Abbey and he was forced to seek audiences in England and America. Deane comments, "It is almost superfluous to say that O'Casey, more than any other Irish dramatist (or writer), engaged with Irish and with world politics in a series of particularly fierce battles." Yet, as Deane adds, "there is a coarsening element in his work related to his attempt to make sense of contemporary political situations in the light of an imperfectly conceived moral system" (*Celtic Revivals* 108).

In placing Friel's work in the Irish tradition of Yeats, Synge, and O'Casey, I turn to the essay by Deane in *Celtic Revivals* because I agree wholeheartedly with his evaluation. He contends that O'Casey proposes that we supplant politics with humanism, but that his humanism is not only separated from political pressures but is based not on "what people should be like" but on "what they are, fundamentally, like" (108). He thereby glorifies the average, lapsing into sentimentalism. Because O'Casey's male characters, with their "hearts o' stone," are "not in any sense heroic or in any tragic way flawed," because they are instead "stupid, vain, egotistical, jargon-ridden," their deaths have no meaning. Only the women die tragically, but they die in the context of the familial unit, which is completely outside the political world. Therefore Deane believes the plays are "marvelously contrived devices" (112). He points out that the division in O'Casey's plays between "sympathetic women and egoistic men . . . makes it impossible for us to conceive of any political commitment not hostile to human feeling" (120).

Yeats's plays, on the other hand, are more powerful than O'Casey's because they question politics "through the medium of all other forms of social behaviour rather than selecting one arbitrarily as the source of value" (112). Yeats is concerned in his drama with supplying Ireland with a new self-image (as I have observed earlier)--a concern that Friel shares. Deane says:

> Yeats's dramatic career stands as the most exemplary of all in its desire to reshape Ireland through the appeal of a revivified formality of stage manner which would represent a new formality of social behaviour and relationship. . . . He was convinced that a new sensibility was revealing itself in new

> forms and new languages. (117)

Deane also comments on Yeats's interest in drama as ritual, a connection with Friel we have observed in Chapter VIII:

> Theatre is more equipped than any other realm of the arts to present an extra-linguistic form which has nevertheless linguistic elements within it. . . . Yeats can reach the point at which the passage from the Dionysiac to the Christian rite becomes a metaphor for the polarities of the human imagination; but the play [*The Resurrection*] is concerned with the process of becoming between these two, not with one at the expense of the other. (113)

These comments seem to me very similar to observations I have made about Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa.*

Thus, Friel seems to be much closer to the purposes of Yeats than to those of O'Casey. While he may not be able to "make sense" of the insanity in the contemporary political situation any more than O'Casey could, he is not handicapped by "an imperfectly conceived moral system." Friel's greatest strengths, in fact, are his deep understanding of human nature, his remarkable perception of human problems, and his infallible judgment on the correct course of action to follow in the difficult choices of a complex world society. While his work is never sentimentally moralistic nor openly didactic, it engages a higher morality, the responsibility we share as human beings who must learn to live together in a shrinking world where we *are* our brothers' keepers. While he does not give answers, he does point directions. Friel's characters are always true; there is never a false note. His plots are never contrived or weak. One feels

a steady, sure hand in control of his drama. One constantly senses that this is the work of genius.

Through its remarkable depth, variety, and insight, Brian Friel's work immeasurably enriches the tradition of Irish literature. There can be no doubt that it will continue to grow in significance and will be recognized for the contribution it makes to the dramatic literature of the world.

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APPENDIX A
CHRONOLOGY

1929 Brian Friel born 9 January in Omagh, County Tyrone, Northern Ireland.

1939 Friel family moves to the city of Derry, Northern Ireland.

1939-1945 Education: Long Tower School and Saint Columb's College, Derry.

1945-1948 Education: Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth, County Kildare, Eire (the National Seminary); graduates with B.A.

1949-1950 Education: Saint Joseph's Teacher Training College, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

1950 Begins teaching in primary and intermediate schools in Derry; begins writing short stories.

1952 First published story, "The Child," appears in *The Bell.*

1954 Marries Anne Morrison.

1958 Two radio plays broadcast on BBC Northern Ireland Home Service: *A Sort of Freedom* and *To This Hard House.*

1959 Short story "The Skelper" published in *The New Yorker;* stories and articles begin appearing regularly in *The New Yorker, The Saturday Evening Post,* and elsewhere. First stage play, *The Francophile (A Doubtful Paradise),* performed at Group Theatre, Belfast.

1960 Retires from teaching.

1961 *The Loves of Cass McGuire* produced on BBC Third Programme.

1962 English and American publication of book of short stories, *A Saucer of Larks. The Enemy Within* premieres, Abbey Theatre, Dublin. *A Doubtful Paradise* produced by BBC Northern Ireland Home Service.

1963 Student of dramaturgy with Tyrone Guthrie at Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, Minnesota. *The Blind Mice* premieres at Eblana Theatre, Dublin, is also performed at Lyric Theatre, Belfast, and on BBC Northern Ireland Home Service. *The Enemy Within* produced by BBC Third Programme.

1964 First major play, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!,* produced at Gaiety Theatre, is hit of Dublin Theatre Festival. *The Founder Members* produced on BBC Light Programme.

1965 BBC television adaptation of *The Enemy Within. Philadelphia, Here I Come!* produced on BBC Third Programme.

1966 First international production, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* opens on Broadway at Helen Hayes Theatre, New York. Second international production, *The Loves of Cass McGuire,* premieres on Broadway at Helen Hayes Theatre. English and American publication of second book of stories, *The Gold in the Sea.*

1967 *The Loves of Cass McGuire* opens at Abbey Theatre, Dublin; *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* at Lyric Theatre, London. *Lovers: Winners and Losers* premieres at Gate Theatre, Dublin.

1968 *Lovers: Winners and Losers* opens at Vivian Beaumont Theatre, New York, and Fortune Theatre, London. *Crystal and Fox* premieres at Gaiety Theatre, Dublin. *Winners* (version of first part of *Lovers)* produced BBC Third Programme.

1969 *The Mundy Scheme* premieres at Olympia Theatre, Dublin; opens at Royale Theatre, New York.

1970 *Crystal and Fox* opens at Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles. Film adaptation of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

1971 *The Gentle Island* premieres at Olympia Theatre, Dublin.

1972 Elected member of the Irish Academy of Letters. *The Gentle Island* opens at Lyric Theatre, Belfast.

1973 *The Freedom of the City* premieres at Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and Royal Court Theatre, London. *Crystal and Fox* produced at McAlpin Rooftop Theatre, New York.

1974 *The Freedom of the City* opens in New York and at Goodman Theater, Chicago.

1975 *Volunteers* premieres at Abbey Theatre, Dublin.

1977 *Living Quarters* premieres at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. *Volunteers* produced in Northampton, Massachusetts.

1979 *Aristocrats* premieres at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. *Faith Healer* premieres at Longacre Theatre, New York

1980 Founds Field Day Theatre Company with actor Stephen Rea. *Translations,* Field Day's first production, premieres at Guildhall, Derry. *American Welcome* presented at Jon Jory's Actors Theatre, Louisville, Kentucky, as one of ten-sketch set of satirical jibes at American mores, written by non-American, English-speaking playwrights.

1981 *Translations* awarded the Ewart-Biggs Peace Prize and the Harvey's of Bristol Irish Theatre Award for best new Irish play of 1980-81. Friel receives the Irish-American Cultural Institute award for 1981. *Translations* opens at Hampstead and Lyttleton Theatres, London, and Manhattan Theatre Club, New York. Friel's translation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* premieres at Guildhall, Derry. *Faith Healer* opens at Royal Court Theatre, London, and is aired as a radio play by BBC.

1982 Elected member of Aosdana, the national treasury of Irish artists. *The Communication Cord* premieres at Guildhall, Derry, and at Gaiety Theatre, Dublin. *Faith Healer* opens at Abbey Theatre, Dublin.

1983 Awarded honorary D. Litt. by National University of Ireland. *The Communication Cord* opens at Hampstead Theatre, London.

1987 Accepts nomination to the Irish Senate. Adaptation of Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* premieres, Lyttleton Theatre, South Bank, London.

1988 *Making History* premieres at Guildhall, Derry; opens at Gaiety Theatre Dublin and National Theatre, London. *Fathers and Sons* opens at Long Wharf, New Haven.

1989 BBC Radio devotes a six-play season to Friel: the first living playwright to be so honored. *Aristocrats* opens Manhattan Theatre Club and Theatre Four, New York.

1990 *Dancing at Lughnasa* premieres at Abbey Theatre, Dublin and National Theatre, London. *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* opens at South Street Theatre, New York. *The London Vertigo,* adaptation of Charles Macklin's *The True Born Irishman* or *The Irish Fine Lady,* published.

1991 *Making History* opens at Samuel Beckett Theatre, New York. *Dancing at Lughnasa* opens at Plymouth Theatre, New York; wins Laurence Olivier Award for Best Play of the Year in London.

1992 *Dancing at Lughnasa* wins Antoinette Perry (Tony) Awards for Best Play on a New York Stage, Best Direction, and Best Featured Actress in a Play.

APPENDIX B
GAELIC PRONUNCIATION

The following guide is included as an aid to the pronunciation of the many Gaelic words which occur in this study. The best guide to pronouncing Irish is a native speaker; the following outline is at best a poor substitute. Irish is a more or less phonetic language, but the actual spelling system is quite complex. This is because 18 letters have to be manipulated to cover 60-odd sounds. The language contains no j, k, q, v, w, x, y, or z. Many sounds in Irish do not exist in English.

Every consonant has two sounds, depending on the nearest vowel. A broad vowel makes its consonant broad; a slender vowel makes it slender. The broad vowels are a, o, and u. The slender vowels are i and e. Generally speaking, with a broad consonant the lips are slack, and with a slender consonant they are tensed.

In pronouncing broad consonants, the lips are slack:

b = bw
c = k with the tongue further back in the mouth
d = d in "Dan," but thicker, tongue behind lower teeth
f = fw lips are very slack, front upper teeth inside lower lip
g = g in "got"
l = l in "love"
m = mw
n = n in "fun"
p lips very slack
r = r in "run," but broader; initial r is nearly always broad
s = s in "sad"
t = t in "too," but broader.

In pronouncing slender consonants, the lips are tensed:
b = English b, but the lips are tighter
c = ky with the tongue well forward (no equivalent in English)
d = d in "duke"; tongue behind upper teeth
f = f in "five"; lips tight, front upper teeth outside lower lip
g = almost like gy; tongue well forward
l = ly, like the l in "value"
m = similar to the English m
n = n in "new"
p = lips very tight
r = like a cross between r and z
s = like sh in English
t = like English tch, as in "tune"

Aspirated consonants are consonants followed by h. The sound is changed as follows:

	broad	slender
bh, mh	w	v
ch	as in "loch"	rather like h in "hue"
dh, gh	1. Initial: gutteral sound at back of throat	like y
	2. In the middle of a word silent	
	3. At the end of word: adh = oo as in "fool"	
fh	silent	
ph	like f	
sh, th	like h in "how"	like h in "humid"

The eclipse involves replacing an initial letter with another sound. The original letter is written but not spoken. "páirc (park)--a field--becomes i bpáirc (ih bark)--in the field. An exception is the eclipsed ng in which both letters are pronounced.

In all dialects the accent is usually on the first syllable. The fada is the accent like the French acute (´) over a vowel. It makes the vowel long and sometimes indicates stress.

a = ä	á = aw	ea = ah
e = e	é = ay	aoi = ee in "see"
i = i	í = ee	
o = u	ó = ou	
u = u	ú = oo	

APPENDIX C

PRODUCTIONS OF THE FIELD DAY THEATRE COMPANY, 1980-88

1980 *Translations* by Brian Friel

1981 *Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov, translated by Brian Friel

1982 *The Communication Cord* by Brian Friel

1983 *Boesman and Lena* by Athol Fugard

1984 A double bill: Tom Paulin's version of *Antigone* entitled *The Riot Act,* and Derek Mahon's verse translation of Moliere's *Ecole des Maris* entitled *High Time*

1985 *Double Cross* by Thomas Kilroy

1986 *Pentecost* by Stewart Parker

1987 *Saint Oscar* by Terry Eagleton

1988 *Making History* by Brian Friel

APPENDIX D

A TRANSCRIPT OF THE NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO INTERVIEWS WITH BRIAN FRIEL, SEAMUS DEANE, SEAMUS HEANEY, AND DAVID HAMMOND

(This transcription is included to provide a reference source for quotations taken from the interview.)

Part I

Bob Edwards: The largest collection of Irish writing in ninety years has just been published. The three-volume *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* includes prose, poetry, plays, songs, political speeches, and editorials from Irish newspapers. The material dates from 600 A.D. to the present and spans Latin, Gaelic, and English, but this is not a literary exercise assembled by a group of academics. The anthology was put together by Field Day, an organization of artists and writers founded in 1980 to explore the possibilities of creating a cultural thread to sew together a politically divided country, to give the Irish a sense of who they are. Field Day started out producing plays and touring them around the countryside, then the group published pamphlets, and now the anthology. Its editors are both Northern and Southern, Catholic and Protestant. Four of them join me in the studio: poet, critic, and group leader Seamus Deane, playwright Brian Friel, filmmaker David Hammond, and poet Seamus Heaney.

Seamus Heaney: There are many, many ways of approaching the meaning of the anthology. The first Irishman on the English stage, who is indeed a stage Irishman, is in Shakespeare's Henry V, Captain MacMorris. He asks a question there which has constantly been in need of answer ever since. He is accused of being a representative of his nation and he says, "What ish my nation? Ish a pish." The anthology is the last of a series of answers to that question. The 18th century gave an answer saying the nation is the civil planted Anglo-Irish Protestant nation. The late 19th century Yeatsian Irish Revival answer was given over and over, saying we were an alliance

of that 18th-century Protestant nation and, Yeats thought, the primo Celtic denizens of the island. Yeats obliterated the middle class. Then if you think of all that's left over in the middle, it belongs to another answer, and it was given by Mr. Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses.* He's asked what is his nation and he says, "Ireland, I was born there." Joyce takes everything that Yeats leaves out; aristocrats--to Hell with them, as far as Joyce is concerned. Peasantry can't bear the smell of them. Everything else--the great unwashed modern democratic undignified seethe--he'll have that. Those are only three versions . The anthology answers the question in many other ways.

Bob Edwards: You have to determine who an Irish writer is. An Irish writer can be someone who lived and died there, someone who never wrote there but who wrote about Ireland, people born in Ireland who didn't write about Ireland, you've got the works.

Seamus Deane: Well, it's problematical. One of the things--and it's really in pursuit of one of the things that Seamus was just saying there--this I think is true of many colonial cultures, but one of the features of Irish writing is a necessary fascination with the idea of civilization itself, with the idea that civilization is not something naturally given. It's an artificial construct that can be lost, and right at the heart of the writing in Ireland there is of course also the other recognition that a language has been lost. It might be of interest if I just gave you a taste of one of the Irish poems, this one written in the 18th century. It's written by a man from Armagh called Art McCuill and the poem is called "An Irish Oerca MaCraggen" (?!), which is "Fair Church out of Craggen," and it's a dream poem about a woman who comes to take him away from the ruined civilization that he has into a fairyland where he will be looked after and he will be consoled for the loss of Gaeldom. So I'll just read one verse in Irish and then a translation.

> At Craggen churchyard last night I slept in grief,
> And out of the dawnlight that crimsoned her cheek,
> A maiden, gold fiber in her hair, came to kiss me.
> Just to stare on that princess lifted the blight from the world
> And gave it relief.

I think that notion of the world blighted and some imaginative reconstruction necessary to give relief to that blight, that's something that recurs time again, not just in the writing in Irish but also in the writing in English. And the fights--like the claim to possession--can be a claim to possession over a language, a dispossession from it, over a name, a dispossession from it, over a territory and dispossession of it. And I like to think that the anthology has this kind of symmetry in relation to the whole Field Day enterprise in this sense, that our very first play was Brian Friel's great play *Translations,* which was about the renaming of Ireland when it was being remapped by the ordnance survey engineers of the British army in the early 19th century, and how the act of renaming then literally alters the landscape, the landscape becomes other than it had been, and perhaps if Brian would read one of the famous speeches from that play in which that relationship is articulated, it might help to clarify. . .

Brian Friel: Yes, just a few lines. There are two characters on stage. One is an old drunken Gaelic schoolmaster who is watching this transformation of his parish and of his locality taking place, and he is talking to a young English officer who has got a very romantic notion of the country he is colonizing--as all colonists do --but he does feel that he somehow is not participating in the life of the country. Anyhow, the old schoolmaster turns to the young army officer and he says to him:

> To return briefly to that other matter, Lieutenant, I understand your sense of exclusion, of being cut off from our life here, and I trust you will find access to us with my son's help, but remember that words are signals, counters, they are not immortal, and it can happen, to use an image you'll understand, it can happen that a civilization can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour that no longer matches the landscape of fact.

Bob Edwards: Brian Friel reading from his play *Translations.* The play is included in the just published *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing.* Tomorrow Friel and the other editors of the anthology,

Seamus Deane and Seamus Heaney, address the notion of Ireland as a country of storytellers. To end this hour, Field Day editor and filmmaker David Hammond sings a ballad included in the collection.

Part II

> Well, you know or don't you kennet or haven't I told you every telling has a taling and that's the he and the she of it. Look, look, the dusk is growing! My branches lofty are taking root. And my cold cher's gone ashley. Fieluhr? Filou!

Bob Edwards: James Joyce reading from his novel *Finnegans Wake.* In his writing Joyce captures the vibrancy of Irish speech and conjures images of characters never at a loss for words. It's a popular notion that Ireland is a country of storytellers--a notion some Irish would dispute. Among those, remarkably, are the editors of a massive new three-volume anthology of Irish writing. I asked playwright Brian Friel, poet Seamus Heaney, and critic and poet Seamus Deane whether the very act of compiling a collection that spans almost fifteen centuries doesn't verify the Irish penchant for storytelling. Heaney began the rebuttal.

Seamus Heaney: Every civilization or culture has its story--the once upon a time this happened. When you ask that question to Irish writers or Irish critics or whatever, they get jumpy because of the following set of conditions. This is one of the stereotypes we have, that we are very interesting storytelling people. It may be the truth, but it's a truth that Irish writers in particular approach gingerly because it seems to give a kind of credit to the fact that there is an essential Irishness which discovers itself in story telling, and an attendant thing to that is that Irish writers are full of volubility and colorful speech and so on. There is evidence for this but there's also evidence of self hatred for that particular thing. See under Beckett or see under Joyce. Joyce can set a documentary stream of speech going that is utterly exciting because of its verity--its truth to life. On the other hand, there is silence, exile, and cunning going into that. There's a kind of observation evident, a punitive placing of it, saying look at all that talk, for God's sake.

Each person is hesitating on your story question because of the double bind. (Friel ?: You just weaved your answer into a story.) But I think that this is not particularly an Irish phenomenon, is it? (Friel?: No.)

Bob Edwards: Well, you're tired of hearing it, I'm sure. But I think it is.

Heaney: We have a need for stories, not that we genetically have a peculiar skill in telling stories, but that if a culture has had enforced upon it the need to tell a story that will make sense of its past--and that's what stories very often do--and if the past has been, in the view of the storyteller or tellers, broken, ruptured in some way, the attempt to knit things together through stories, through a narrative, becomes not just some kind of fabulous spinning of a yarn. This actually becomes a way of trying to hold on to the idea of coherence in the midst of incoherence. That kind of experience does produce in the writers themselves--and perhaps produces more writers out of the people than would be normal--a need for a kind of narrative that will say incoherence is what I experience, what I do with it is--you know. Irish people indulge the rage for order in their narratives because there is so much disorder in their other experience and that's partly because of the political history of the place.

Bob Edwards: For whom are you creating this anthology?

Seamus Deane: Well, primarily for the people of Ireland; then for the people of Ireland who live in other parts and other communities of the world, and then generally for the world audience that is interested in one of the multifarious achievements of Western culture, of which this is one example. I would also like to think that it would be--an especially important part of the audience that we envisage for this would be America. One of the things that has slightly frustrated me in various visits I've paid to the U. S., teaching in various universities or colleges on short term bases, has been the perception that Irish writing somehow seems to have begun somewhere in the late 1880s with Yeats and Joyce. The deep perspective out of which they come has been rendered invisible. It

is also a simple fact, and this is where I come back to straightforward information, that many of the texts that preceded them were not printed or reprinted, mostly for commercial reasons because there wasn't a sufficiently large audience for it. That's why we constructed the anthology to some extent on this scale, to provide a lot of stuff that otherwise has not been collectible for the purposes of teaching and transmission.

Bob Edwards: Well, do you think you've done that?

Friel?: Summing was defined all right, I think, but Seamus. . .

Seamus Deane: In the introduction I do say it's an act of definition but not a definitive action. This is so heterogeneous, so dyslexic in some respects, that there is nobody--no matter how monocular or how bigoted--within the Irish system, either in Ireland or outside it, who can say: Well, this anthology reveals to us that the central tradition is A, B, or C, you know, Catholic Nationalist, Protestant Unionist, whatever. There is no central tradition. There is no metaphysical ghost of Irishness haunting these pages. What there is is a discrete and marvelous achievement of a number of peoples living in different centuries on the same island who have because of what happened on that island, certainly, have a number of preoccupations, or that, whether it's implicit or not in the heterogeneity, what we're saying is that the invention of a tradition is what anthologies are about, and colonial cultures more than national state cultures need that capacity to invent, to be creative, to commit to full possession of that which has been in some ways denied them.